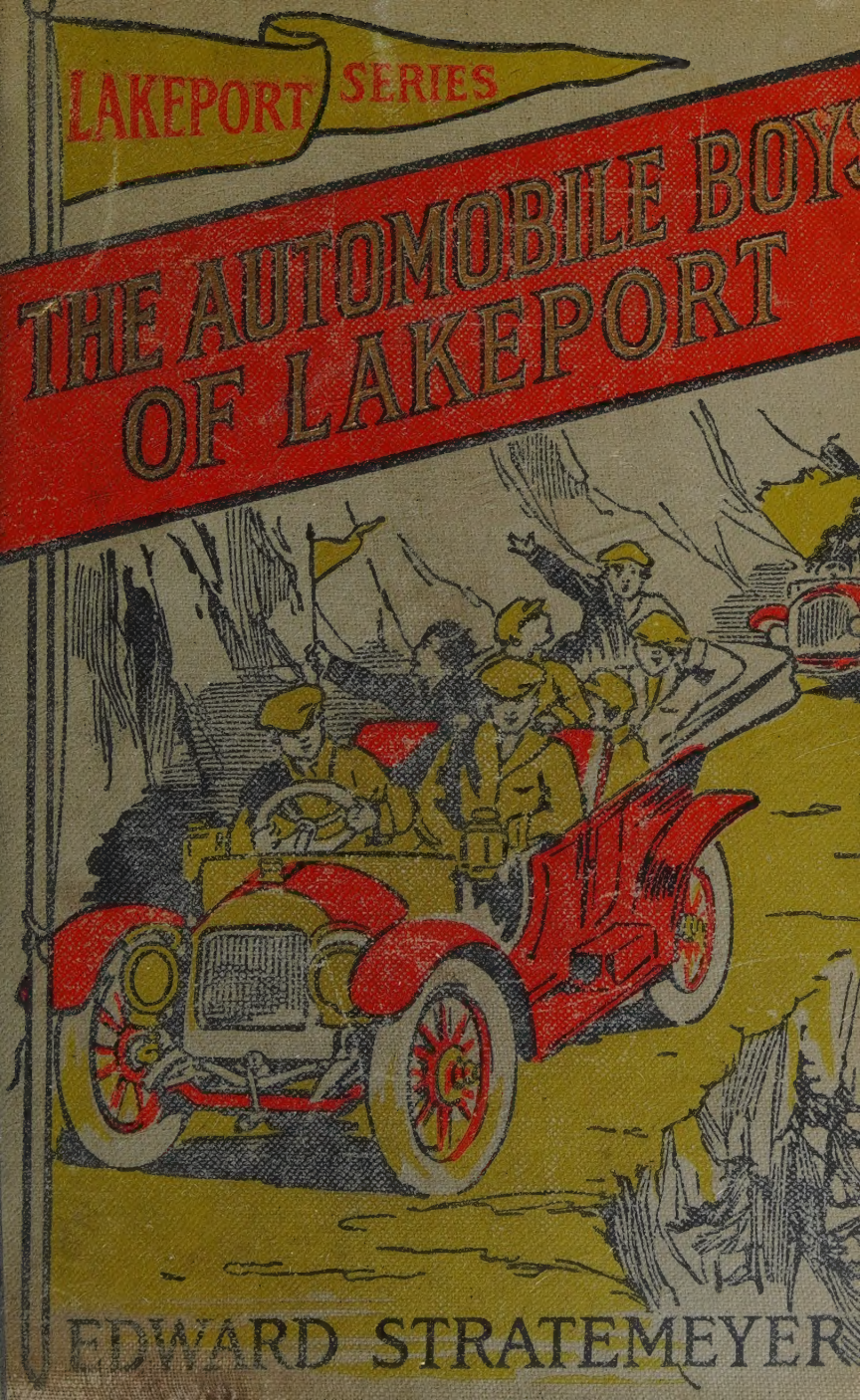
LAKEPORT SERIES

THE AUTOMOBILE BOYS OF LAKEPORT



EDWARD STRATEMEYER

CHS-134 c
c.2

He cleared the side of Si's car and landed in the tonneau of the runaway.—*Page 307.*

LAKEPORT SERIES

The Automobile Boys of Lakeport

OR

A Run for Fun and Fame

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "The Gun Club Boys of Lakeport," "The Football Boys of Lakeport," "Dave Porter Series," "Old Glory Series," "Pan-American Series," Etc

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN GOSS

BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

Published, August, 1910

COPYRIGHT, 1910, BY LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

All rights reserved

THE AUTOMOBILE BOYS OF LAKEPORT

Norwood Press
BERWICK & SMITH CO.
Norwood, Mass.
U. S. A.

PREFACE

THIS story is a complete tale in itself, but forms the fifth volume in a line known under the general title of "Lakeport Series."

In the first volume of this series, entitled "The Gun Club Boys of Lakeport," I told how the boys organized their club and went out for a winter of sport in the woods. They took an old hunter with them, and had "the time of their lives," as one of them afterwards declared.

With the coming of warm weather the thoughts of the lads turned to our great national game, and in the next volume, "The Baseball Boys of Lakeport," I gave the particulars of some exciting contests of the diamond.

Lakeport, as its name implies, is located on the shore of a beautiful sheet of water, and in the third volume of this series, "The Boat Club Boys of Lakeport," I related how the lads became the owners of a first-class rowing outfit. They had some enemies, who tried to get the better of them; but all came out right in the end.

At the close of the boating season, the minds of

the youths turned to other sports, and in "The Football Boys of Lakeport" I showed how they organized their eleven and strove to win the league championship. The rivalry around the lake was exceedingly bitter, and the boys had to work like Trojans to gain first place.

Many of the lads owned bicycles, but wished they possessed automobiles. At last some of them obtained the use of a big touring-car, and in the present book I have related the particulars of a long trip through the mountains, and how the boys won a stirring race. Once the garage in which the costly car was stored was in danger of fire, and the lads had a hard fight to save the property from destruction. Again, their rivals decamped with the automobile, carrying it off in the darkness.

Automobiling is to-day one of the best of our sports. The writer is himself the fortunate possessor of a touring-car, and during the time this story was being written enjoyed numerous trips around his home and beyond. It is a clean, healthy recreation. The one drawback is the tendency to speed beyond the limits of safety, and this tendency should be discouraged by every one who owns or runs an automobile.

EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

July 15, 1910.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Meeting on the Road	1
II.	A Young Man in Trouble	11
III.	A Sale of Land	22
IV.	The Voups at Home	32
V.	Out on the Lake	43
VI.	Fighting Fireworks	53
VII.	The Automobile Races	64
VIII.	Mr. Corsen Thinks It Over	75
IX.	An Invitation Accepted	85
X.	An Offer of an Automobile	96
XI.	The First Lesson	106
XII.	A Little Hold-Up	117
XIII.	Plotting to Ruin a Car	128
XIV.	What Happened at the Picnic	138
XV.	A Fourth-of-July Adventure	149
XVI.	The Disabled Touring-Car	159
XVII.	Planning a Tour	169
XVIII.	The Fire at the Garage	180
XIX.	The Start of the Tour	191
XX.	Caught in a Storm	203
XXI.	A Great Race	214
XXII.	Making New Friends	224
XXIII.	The Constable of Coville	235
XXIV.	On the Road Once More	246
XXV.	In Which the Automobile is Stolen	256

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXVI.	On the Tugboat	266
XXVII.	Some Talk of Importance	276
XXVIII.	Clearing Up Some Mysteries	286
XXIX.	The Race for the Car	296
XXX.	The Prize Parade—Conclusion	306

ILLUSTRATIONS

He cleared the side of Si's car and landed in the tonneau of the runaway (page 307) . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

The boys quickly assisted the rich man and his daughter to the deck of the sloop 54

"Block the wheels, boys!" he cried to the others . . 76

"I am not stopping you from passing. Drive around all you want to" 124

"Hi! hi! stop that!" yelled Harry 140

"Say, did you drop this?" demanded Harry . . . 172

Back shot the car, with Fred clinging to the radiator . 188

"Halt, or we'll bu'st yer tires ter flinders!" . . . 234

THE AUTOMOBILE BOYS OF LAKEPORT

CHAPTER I

A MEETING ON THE ROAD

"Boys, this looks like a wild-goose chase to me."

"Well, Harry, you haven't got to go any farther if you don't want to," responded Fred Rush, as he slowed up on the bicycle he was riding.

"Let us go half a mile farther, and then, if we can't find the balloon, we can give it up," said Joe Westmore. "I was sure, though, that it was coming down somewhere along this road."

"Well, that's the way it looked to me, when we started," answered Harry Westmore. "But I guess that balloon was higher in the air than we thought."

"This is getting to be a great age, with its balloons and aeroplanes, and all that," remarked Fred Rush, as the three lads pedaled on under the trees of the winding country road. "Wouldn't you fellows like to own an airship?"

"I'd like to own an automobile just about now,"

grumbled Harry. "It would beat shoving a bicycle all to pieces."

"That's a fact," answered his brother. "But I'm afraid we'll have to be content with our wheels—autos cost such a lot of money. But say, couldn't we go scooting around if we had an auto!" he added, enthusiastically.

"That's a beauty Mr. Corsen has," said Fred Rush. "It has six cylinders, and room for seven people, and his man told me it could make fifty miles an hour! That's as fast as an express train!"

"Excuse me from riding fifty miles an hour on these roads, Fred!" cried Joe. "Why, you'd run into a tree or a rock in less than a quarter of a minute! You want a straight and level highway for that sort of work."

"I see Si Voup still runs his auto," said Fred. "He was out in it this morning. I believe he came out this way, too." He came to a halt as a clearing was reached and looked up at the sky. "I don't believe that balloon stopped here at all. It must have sailed on right over Brookside. We've had our ride after it for nothing."

"Oh, what of it?" answered Joe, cheerfully. "It's a fine morning, and we wanted to ride anyway. Let's stop looking for the balloon and go on to Brookside."

"Here comes an auto!" cried Harry, as a machine hove into view around a bend of the road.

"Yes, and it's Si Voup's," added his brother. "Ike Boardman is with him."

"They'll want the whole road—wait and see," murmured Fred Rush. "Si don't believe in letting anybody else have anything."

"I'll not give him the whole road," came stoutly from Harry. "He can have his half and that's all."

"Right you are," added his big brother.

The three boys kept on their bicycles, and as they moved forward they heard the horn of the automobile toot hoarsely. The driver of the car kept to the middle of the highway, although there was ample room to move to one side. He had a sickly grin on his face, and was talking earnestly to a youth who sat beside him.

"It's Joe Westmore's crowd!" said he.

"Why don't you give 'em a scare, Si?" asked his companion.

"I will—I'll make 'em get off the road," answered Si Voup.

He kept to the middle of the highway and tooted his horn again. He firmly expected that the boys on the bicycles would turn off into the grass, but he was mistaken.

"Hi! get out of the way!" he roared, as he came closer.

"Steer out yourself, Si Voup!" called Joe. "We have as much right on this road as you."

"Don't you dare to run us down!" added Fred Rush.

"Be careful, or you'll kill somebody!" exclaimed Ike Boardman, in sudden terror, and then Si threw over the wheel of the machine and sent the car to the right. He was so close to the bicyclists that he grew excited and sent the automobile over farther than intended. With a crash it landed in some bushes, and then the youthful driver threw out the clutch and jammed on the brakes.

"Now see what you made me do!" roared Si Voup, as the car came to a standstill, and he shook his fist at those in the road.

"It's your own fault, Si," answered Joe, as he came to a halt and dismounted, followed by his brother and Fred Rush.

"It isn't my fault at all," bellowed the boy, who was well known as the bully of Lakeport. "You got right in my way!"

"We had a right to our share of the road," said Harry.

"If my machine is damaged, you'll pay the bill!"

"Not a cent!" came from Fred. "You thought

you'd scare us, Si, and that's what you get for doing it."

"I say, you made me run into the bushes. One of my lamps is smashed, and the paint on the hood is all scratched. You'll settle for that, mark my words!"

"See here, Si Voup, you can't scare us," exclaimed Joe, striding close to where the bully sat. "If you had kept to your side of the road, you would have been all right."

"Don't bother to talk to him, Joe," advised Harry. "If he doesn't know the rules of the road, let him suffer."

"That's the talk—come on," added Fred.

"Hi, ain't you going to help us out of the bushes?" asked Ike Boardman, as the three bicyclists mounted their wheels once more.

"No!" came from those addressed.

"You wait—you'll hear from me!" roared Si Voup. "You'll pay for the damage done!"

"Do you think he'll make a complaint?" asked Harry, as he and his brother and Fred rode away.

"I don't know—I hope not," answered Joe.

"It will be just like Si to make all the trouble possible," was Fred's comment. And then he let out a burst of speed and his chums did likewise; and soon the automobile was lost to sight in the

distance. They knew that it could be backed on to the road again with ease, and that the damage to the machine, outside of the broken lamp, was trifling.

To those who have read the previous volumes in this "Lakeport Series" the lads thus far mentioned will need no special introduction. For the benefit of others let me state that all belonged to the town of Lakeport, a pretty place, located at the foot of Pine Lake. Here Mr. Westmore, the father of Joe and Harry, was the leading flour and feed merchant, while Fred Rush's parent kept a hardware store.

A little over two years before this tale opens, Joe, Harry, and Fred had organized a gun club, and what this organization did has already been related in detail in the first volume of this series, entitled "The Gun Club Boys of Lakeport." In company with a trusty old hunter named Joel Runnell they journeyed to Pine Island, near the head of the lake, and there spent some time in hunting and trapping game, and in having a good time generally.

With the coming of summer the thoughts of the boys turned to baseball. One of the lads who had joined the gun club was Link Darrow, the son of a boss carpenter. From his father Link got permission to use the carpenter shop as a clubhouse, and with the aid of Paul Shale, Bart Mason, and some

other boys, Joe Westmore managed to organize a baseball club. A rival nine was gotten up by Si Voup and Ike Boardman, and what this rivalry led to has been told in "The Baseball Boys of Lakeport." Si was very mean, and did some things that came near to getting him into trouble with the authorities. But his father was rich, and managed to smooth matters over, and thus save his son from possible arrest.

At the end of the summer most of the Lakeport boys had gone back to school, and thus the winter passed quickly. In the spring there was some talk of reorganizing the baseball club, but then came word that the lads of Brookside, led by George Dixon, had gotten up a boat club, and the "fever" at once spread. By good luck Joe and his followers obtained possession of a first-class rowing outfit, and also the use of a sailboat owned by Paul Shale's uncle, and what the lads did in some contests on the lake has been set down in a book called "The Boat Club Boys of Lakeport." Again Si Voup and his cronies tried to injure our friends, and again Mr. Voup had to come forward and save his offspring from punishment.

Football had always been a favorite pastime in the various towns on and near the lake, and with the coming of autumn the boys grew anxious to see

what they could do on the gridiron. They organized an eleven, and applied for admission to the lake football league. Hearing of this, Si Voup got together some lads who had just moved into Lakeport and, with Ike Boardman, organized a rival eleven, and likewise applied for a place in the league. Voup did some underhanded work, even bribing some boys to vote against the Westmore eleven, but he was exposed, as related in " The Football Boys of Lakeport," and his application to enter the league was rejected, while the Westmore application was accepted.

The contest for the football pennant proved to be a hard-fought one, and Lakeport might have lost, had it not been for the splendid coaching of an old college man named Carl Bellman, and for the assistance they received from Mr. Munroe Corsen. Mr. Corsen was a very rich man, whose mansion was located on the outskirts of Lakeport. Some of the boys had once saved Mr. Corsen's little daughter Violet from some wicked men who had abducted her, and for this the rich gentleman and his wife were extremely grateful. The gentleman assisted the club financially, and also offered a valuable silver cup to the winning eleven.

" He is certainly a friend worth having," said Joe to his chums, and all agreed with him.

The success of the Lakeport eleven had made Si Voup more sour than ever. Even though he belonged in Lakeport, he would have preferred to see the victory go elsewhere. It galled him exceedingly when anybody spoke of what the Westmore boys and their chums had done on the gridiron, on the diamond, and on the lake.

"They ain't so much!" he would grumble. "They came out on top by a fluke, that's all. They can't row, or play baseball, or football, any better than anybody else!"

"Sour grapes, Si!" answered one of the boys who heard him, and this made the rich bully so angry that he wanted to fight on the spot, but the other lad happened to be as large as himself, and he was afraid.

"Never mind, we'll show 'em some day," said Ike Boardman, soothingly. His parents were not as well off as were the Voups, and he deemed it wise to toady to Si in everything.

Winter had come with the ending of the football season, and during that time the Westmores and their chums had gone to school for the larger part of the time. During the Christmas holidays some of them had gone out camping on the shore of a distant lake, and had brought down considerable game. Si Voup had left town, too,

and had tried to spoil their outing, but had not succeeded.

It was now early spring once more, and the Lakeport boys were wondering what they had best do during the warm weather. A few were going off on a vacation and the others were thinking of reorganizing the boat club, or the baseball club. There was also some talk of getting up a bicycle club and making a tour, but so far nothing had been settled.

Early on the morning that this story opens Harry and Joe had decided to take a spin on their wheels, and they asked Fred to go with them. While riding along they saw a big balloon in the air, sailing in the direction of Brookside and determined to go after it. Now, however, the balloon had disappeared, and it was doubtful if they would catch sight of it again.

CHAPTER II

A YOUNG MAN IN TROUBLE

"HELLO, there!"

The call came from behind the Westmore boys and Fred Rush, and, looking back, they saw another lad on a wheel, trying his best to catch up to them.

"It's Link!" cried Fred, slowing up, and the others did the same.

"Say, I've had a hard time of it reaching you!" called out the carpenter's son, as he came on. "I didn't know you had gotten so far ahead."

"Want us for anything in particular?" questioned Joe, quickly, thinking Link might bring news from home.

"No. Father said I could have the morning off, and I made up my mind I'd join you, that's all."

"Did you meet Si Voup with his auto?" asked Harry.

"Indeed I did! He and Ike Boardman were backing it out of a clump of bushes. One of the lamps was busted. Si said you made him run off the road, and he's going to claim damages."

"We did nothing of the kind!" answered Fred, and then the corpulent youth told the particulars of the encounter.

"I thought it might be that way," said Link. "Si makes me sick! I'd give as much as ten cents to have him move out of this neighborhood."

"I think I'd make it eleven cents," came from Harry, and this caused a general grin.

"By the way, did you see the posters they are putting up in town?" went on the carpenter's son, after all had resumed their riding.

"Circus?" questioned Fred, eagerly. "Oh, wouldn't I like to go to one!"

"No, it's some kind of an automobile meet, at Cresco. The rich men of that town are getting it up. There are to be some great races."

"I'd like to see some auto races!" cried Harry. "When is this to come off?"

"A week from next Saturday."

"Then perhaps we can get off and go."

"Want to get caught in another forest fire?" queried Fred. During the football season the eleven had journeyed to Cresco, and on returning home on their bicycles had been caught in a fierce forest conflagration.

"I don't look for a forest fire this time of year," answered Joe.

The four lads pedaled along at an easy speed, and as they advanced they talked over the coming automobile contests. Presently they came to a split in the road, and Joe looked inquiringly at the others.

"Let us take the lower road for a change," suggested his brother. "It's fine along the brook."

"That will suit me," answered Fred, and led the way around a bend and down a slight hill.

It was a beautiful stretch of country roadway, with the big trees on one side and a large pasture on the other. At the foot of the hill a stony brook sparkled brightly in the sunlight. Among the trees and bushes the birds were chirping gayly, but otherwise all was quiet. Since meeting Si Voup with his car the bicyclists had encountered no one.

"Let us stop at the brook for a drink," suggested Link. "It's fine spring water, and always cold."

Near the brook the road made another turn, in the direction of a substantially built rustic bridge. As the four youths swept the bend all gave a cry of astonishment and alarm.

And well they might, for at the side of the roadway, partly in the dirt and partly on the grass, lay the form of a young man. He was well dressed, but his clothing was covered with dirt. His eyes

were closed, and blood was running from a cut on the side of his face. His soft brown hat lay some distance away.

"What's the matter with him?" questioned Harry, as he and the others dismounted and dropped their bicycles in the grass.

"Must have had an accident of some kind," returned Fred.

"Is he—he dead?" faltered the carpenter's son.

"No, he isn't dead," announced Joe, who had gone on his knees beside the stranger. "He has been struck, or something."

"Maybe tramps knocked him out," said his brother. "They have been reported in this vicinity."

"I don't think it was tramps," came from Fred. "He hasn't been robbed," and he pointed to the stranger's watch and chain, and ruby scarfpin.

"Oh!" came faintly from the sufferer. "Oh!"

"Let us get some water and bathe his face!" cried Harry, and ran down to the brook. He carried a collapsible drinking cup in his pocket, and this he quickly filled. Some of the water was poured over the stranger's face, and a little was forced between his lips. The boys carried him to the side of the roadway and propped him up against a grassy bank.

"He's coming around," announced Joe, presently, and a moment later the young man opened his eyes and gave a long sigh. He gazed at the boys in a dazed fashion.

"You're all right," said Joe, kindly. "Want a drink of water?" For Harry had just procured a second cupful.

"Oh, my head!" moaned the sufferer, and raised his hand in a feeble way.

He took a swallow of water, and the rest was used to bathe his cheeks and his forehead. Fred picked up his hat and brushed it off.

"I guess I was—was knocked out, wasn't I?" asked the young man, presently, and a sickly smile crossed his face.

"I rather guess you were," answered Joe. "How did it happen?"

"I—er—I don't know exactly. I was walking along the road, and I had just crossed the brook bridge when something whizzed up and hit me, and down I went."

"Was it an automobile?" asked Harry.

"Why, I—er—I guess so. Seems to me I heard a horn, or something. I made a jump, but the thing caught me in the side, and down I went in a heap. I tried to get up, but couldn't, and then I lost consciousness."

"And you didn't see the thing at all?" questioned Link.

"Now I come to remember, I did see it, and it was an automobile."

"I suppose you didn't get the number?" said Fred.

"Number? I hadn't time to get anything. It was just toot! bang! and down I went! I suppose I can be thankful I wasn't killed!"

"It must have been Si Voup's machine!" exclaimed Harry.

"It would be just like Si to knock somebody down and never stop to find out how much damage had been done," added the carpenter's son.

"Which way was the machine going?" asked Fred.

"That way," and the stranger pointed up the hill. "I suppose he wasn't going very fast, otherwise I might have been killed."

It was with much difficulty that the sufferer arose to his feet. The boys assisted him to the brook, and there he bathed his face and his hands. The boys also brushed off his clothing for him.

"It's very good of you to aid me," said the young man, and then he asked who they were. He gave his own name as Al Milton, and said he was a traveling salesman.

"I had a spell of sickness this spring, and the doctor advised me to take a rest, so I came to Brookside," he went on. "I've been feeling much better, but I'm afraid this accident is going to set me back."

"Whoever knocked you down ought to be locked up for it," said Link. "It was a mean trick to run away and leave you lying in the road."

"So it was," answered Al Milton. "The least the driver of that auto could have done would have been to stop and give me his assistance. If I can find out who is responsible I'll make him suffer."

He asked about Si Voup and his machine, and took down the bully's address.

"Of course we can't say it was Voup," explained Joe. "But we came straight from that direction, and Voup's was the only auto we met."

"Another auto might have taken to some side road," suggested Harry, who wanted to be absolutely fair. "But the side roads are poor, and are seldom used."

"I fancy it was the auto you mention," answered the young man who had been knocked down. "I'll inquire into the matter after I have had a doctor look at my cuts and bruises."

He felt so lame and sore that Joe and Harry ranged up at each side and assisted him in the walk to Brookside, which town, fortunately, was not far

distant. Fred and Link followed, trundling the four bicycles.

"I shan't forget you and your kindness to me," said Al Milton, on parting at the entrance to a doctor's office. "Maybe I'll come over to Lakeport and see you—especially if I discover that this fellow, Voup, is the one who ran me down."

"We'll do what we can for you," answered Joe. "If Voup was mean enough to do such a thing, and then run away, he ought to suffer."

The boys went on their way, halting again at the public common of Brookside. Here were a number of benches, and they sat down to rest

"I see a billboard with an announcement of that auto meet," cried Fred. "I'm going to read the bill," and he walked over, and the others followed.

The announcement filled the lads with interest. There were to be four races at Cresco, two for runabouts and two for touring-cars. Two of the races were to be for speed and two for hill-climbing and general endurance. Valuable prizes were offered.

"Now, if we only owned autos we could enter some of those races," observed Fred.

"I shouldn't mind owning a machine just to ride around in," said Link. "What grand sport it would be, fellows! It would beat bicycling all hollow!"

"But just think of winning a big race!" said Joe. "Maybe you wouldn't care for the prize, eh?"

"Oh, yes, I would," answered the carpenter's son. "But wouldn't it be sport to start on a tour, say from here to Boston, or New York, or Chicago!"

"Yum! yum!" came from Harry. "It would be more fun than gunning, or boating, or anything else, I'm thinking."

"We might organize a regular touring club," suggested Fred. "But what's the use of talking? We haven't any car, and we are not likely to get any. Why, a touring-car costs a couple of thousand dollars, or more."

"You can get 'em for a thousand dollars up," said Link, who had been reading automobile advertisements in the newspapers.

"I heard that Mr. Corsen's six-cylinder car cost thirty-five hundred dollars," said Fred. He turned to Joe with a grin. "Say, Joe, lend me seven thousand dollars, will you?—I want to buy two cars for our football eleven."

"Seven thousand, did you say?" drawled Joe. He pulled some change out of his pocket. "Can't let you have exactly that, Fred. But how will thirty-seven cents do?" And then there was a general laugh.

"Now, if we were only in a five-cent novel we'd run across a cave with two autos stored in it," said Harry. "Then we could take the machines and become 'The Auto Avengers; or, Slain on the Road in the Dark.'"

"Yes, or 'Speedway Spunk, the Million Dollar Prize-Lifter,'" added Fred.

"But we are not in a five-cent novel," said Link, "and we are not going to find any autos. If we want a machine we have got to earn the money to buy it with—and I don't see us earning thirty-five hundred dollars—or a thousand dollars either."

"We might be able to buy one second-hand," suggested Joe. "Once in a while a car is offered pretty cheap."

"I'd be afraid of a car that was too cheap," answered his brother. "I shouldn't want to risk my neck on the road in a machine that might break down."

"Well, let us drop autos for the present," advised Fred. "Come on to the bakeshop. I'll treat to cream puffs."

"And I'll treat to chocolate éclaires," added Joe; and thus, for the time being, automobiles were forgotten.

On coming from the bakeshop, after having procured the dainties, the boys met Al Milton again.

He had his face plastered up, and carried a bottle of medicine.

"The doctor says I'll be all right again in a few days," said the sufferer. "But it was a severe shock."

"It must have been," replied Joe.

CHAPTER III

A SALE OF LAND

When the boys returned to Lakeport they saw nothing of Si Voup and his machine.

"If he ran down Mr. Milton he'll do his best to keep out of sight," said Joe. "That will worry him more than his broken lamp."

"If he says anything to me about the lamp, I'll ask him about Mr. Milton," returned Harry. "I am almost certain he ran the young man down."

That afternoon, just before supper, Joe had to go to the post-office for his father. As he entered the building, he ran into Paul Shale.

"Hello!" cried the former right end of the football eleven. "I was just going over to your house to see you."

"What about, Paul?"

"I have an errand to do to-night, and was wondering if you'd care to go along."

"Where to?"

"To the Dugan farm."

"Want to see Teddy?" asked Joe. He referred

to a bright Irish lad who had accompanied them on their gunning trips, and who had occasionally played baseball and football with them.

"No, I want to see Mr. Dugan. It's about some land my uncle wants to buy."

"I'll go if I can get away," returned Joe. "What time do you want to start?"

"Oh, half-past seven will do. We can go on our wheels."

So it was arranged, and promptly on time Paul called for Joe. He asked Harry to go along, too, but the latter declined, stating that he had some school lessons to do.

The boys lit their bicycle lamps, yet these were scarcely needed, for it was clear, and there was almost a full moon. As they rode along, Joe told his chum about the meeting on the road with Si Voup, and the picking up of Al Milton.

"I saw Si come home this afternoon, with Ike," said Paul. "But he didn't stay long. He just ran into the house for about five minutes, and then he went off again, taking Ike with him. I shouldn't wonder but that they are out yet."

"If they are, I don't care to meet them," answered Joe.

The distance to the Dugan farm was several miles, but the road was a fine one, and it did not

take the two lads long to pedal in sight of the rambling farmhouse.

"Are they expecting you?" asked Joe, as they slowed up to enter the lane leading to the place.

"No, but I guess I'll find Mr. Dugan at home. He rarely goes out in the evening, so Teddy told me."

As the boys approached the house they heard talking in the sitting-room. The curtain of a window was partly raised, and, looking in, Joe and Paul saw that the Dugans had a visitor.

"Why, it's Mr. Voup!" cried Joe. "What can he be doing here?"

"Mr. Voup!" exclaimed Paul, and seemed much disturbed. "Oh, I hope I am in time!"

"Time? What do you mean?"

"My uncle said Mr. Voup was after that land—wanted awfully to get it, although at his own price. It's a strip that leads down to the lake."

"In town?"

"Yes. Some day it will be a valuable waterfront, so my uncle thinks. It was left by will to Mrs. Dugan, but she doesn't want to hold it, so Mr. Dugan is going to sell it."

"Well, you had better see Mr. Dugan about it at once then," cried Joe.

Both boys rested their wheels against a tree, and

Paul ran up on the piazza and knocked on the door. It was Teddy Dugan, as round-faced and as freckled as ever, who answered the summons.

"Why, if it ain't Paul an' Joe!" cried the Irish lad. "Come right in, the folks will be glad to see ye!" And he led the way inside.

"I'd like to see your father and mother in private," whispered Paul.

"Yez would? What fer now?" and Teddy looked at Paul in wonder.

"About that strip of land your mother owns in town."

"Well, now, ain't that sthrange! Say, do ye know ould Voup is here right now after that same land?"

"How much is he willing to give, Teddy?"

"'Tis a sacret, so Voup said, but he will give me mother six hundred dollars."

"My uncle will give more than that," answered Paul promptly.

"Listen!" said Joe, holding up his hand. The three boys were in the hallway, but the door to the sitting-room was ajar.

"That's my offer, and if you want to accept it you'll have to do it now," Mr. Voup was saying. "Six hundred dollars, and I'll give you the cash."

"Well, what do ye say, Caddy?" questioned Mr.

Dugan, as he looked inquiringly at his wife, who sat in a big rocking-chair, slowly rocking to and fro.

"Whatever you say, Andy," answered Mrs. Dugan. She was a woman who weighed all of two hundred and fifty pounds. "Sure, an' I know nathin' av property at all, at all! It might be 'tis a good price fer th' land."

"It's a splendid price," interposed Mr. Voup. "The best price you'll ever get."

"An' why are ye so anxious to close the bargain right now?" queried Andy Dugan, suspiciously.

"I want to settle the matter up before I go away," was the answer. "I am going to New York in a day or two."

"Say, dad, here is Paul Shale wants to see ye!" said Teddy, as he poked his head through the doorway.

"Paul Shale?" repeated Mr. Dugan, rising from his chair and moving towards the hall.

"Who is that?" demanded Mr. Voup, with a start.

"Paul Shale," repeated Mr. Dugan. "But I don't know what he wants."

"That boy!" cried Mr. Voup, and his manner showed that he was much disturbed. "Mr. Dugan, I—er—I wish to settle this matter before you talk to that boy."

"Mr. Dugan, I have a matter of importance to talk over with you," said Paul, stepping into the doorway. He turned to the others in the room and bowed. "Good-evening, Mrs. Dugan."

"How do ye do, Paul?" answered the woman, with a broad smile.

"So you followed me, eh?" cried Mr. Voup, in anything but a pleasant voice. "A nice trick, I must say!"

"I didn't follow you, Mr. Voup," answered Paul, calmly. "I was sent here by my uncle."

"It's a trick, I say!" snarled the rich man. "A beastly trick!"

"What is it all about?" asked Mr. Dugan, somewhat bewildered. He was only a simple farmer, and knew little about business matters.

"It's about that land you wish to sell," answered Paul. "My uncle would like to buy it. He sent me to see you about it."

"Oh, so that's it," said Andy Dugan, and commenced to grin. "Sure, an' it looks loike th' land was in demand. Caddy, mebbe you'll git a betther price fer it."

"My uncle will give you all it is worth, Mr. Dugan."

"I have already closed for the land," broke in Mr. Voup. "I have offered six hundred dollars for

it, and the Dugans have accepted the offer. Isn't that so?" And he turned eagerly to the farmer and his wife.

"No, I haven't sold th' land yit," answered Andy Dugan, bluntly.

"But you will take my offer—it is the best you will get," went on Mr. Voup, pleadingly.

"Sure an' I want to hear what Paul has to say first."

"I offer cash, remember," went on the rich man. "Cash is better than promises."

"I reckon Paul's uncle is good fer anythin' he's afther sayin' he'll pay," answered Andy Dugan, coldly.

"I don't know how much my uncle will pay," said Paul. "But he said he would pay seven hundred or more, if he had to."

"How much more?" demanded Mr. Voup.

"That is his business," responded Paul, stiffly.

"Mr. Dugan, don't you listen to that boy! He isn't a responsible party. I offer you cash. You had better close with me." Mr. Voup drew a check book from his pocket. "I'll give you a check, and you or your wife can get the money out of the Brookside Bank in the morning. Cash beats promises every time!" And there was a note of triumph in Mr. Voup's voice.

"I am authorized to make you an offer of seven hundred dollars," said Paul. "My uncle will pay you cash, too."

"I will make my offer seven hundred,—and pay now," cried Mr. Voup.

At this Andy Dugan looked again at his wife.

"'Tis your land, Caddy," he said. "I'll do what you say, so I will!"

"Mrs. Dugan, will you let me say something?" put in Joe.

"Young man, this is not your business," remarked Mr. Voup, severely, and he glared angrily at the youth before him. On account of Si, he and Joe had had more than one stormy meeting.

"What is it ye want to say, Joe?" asked the lady of the house.

"If I were you, I'd see Paul's uncle before I sold the land. You can get his best offer, and then the best offer of other folks, and then sell to the highest bidder."

"Sure, an' that seems a good idee," said Mr. Dugan, thoughtfully.

"Provided the bidders will wait," broke in Mr. Voup, glaring at Joe angrily. "I make my bid now. If it isn't accepted, I'll withdraw it by to-morrow."

"I know my uncle will give all the land is worth,"

said Paul. "I hope you will see him before you sell."

"I'll do it," answered Andy Dugan, after a few whispered words to his wife. "Mr. Voup, I'll not accept your offer until I see what I can do elsewhere."

A heated discussion followed, and Mr. Voup, in his disappointment, accused Paul and Joe of breaking in on his business affairs.

"I am acting for my uncle, and he has as much right to buy that land as you have," declared Paul.

"And I want to see the Dugans treated fairly," added Joe.

"Oh, I know you, Westmore!" fumed the rich man. "You are continually doing something to annoy me and my son. But some day I'll corner you, see if I don't!"

"I give the b'y credit fer thryin' to aid us," came from Mr. Dugan. "To-morrow, at ten o'clock, I'll be at Mr. Westmore's sthore, to see me an' Paul's uncle, an' anybody else who wants to buy th' land —an' the highest bidder will git it—an' that settles it."

"I'll not be there!" flared back Mr. Voup, and then stalked from the house without bidding anybody good-night.

"He's as mad as a hornet, so he is!" was Teddy

Dugan's comment, as he saw the rich man drive away in his buggy.

"I think he'll be on hand, nevertheless, to see if he can't get the land," returned Joe.

"Well, it will be afther goin' to the highest bidder," said Mr. Dugan; and there the matter rested.

Paul told his uncle of what had occurred, and Mr. Richard Shale went down to Mr. Westmore's store on the following morning to meet Mr. Dugan. The Irish farmer and his wife were on time, and brought with them a real estate dealer who appraised the land at eight hundred dollars.

"Well, I will give that for it," said Richard Shale.

The opinion of Mr. Westmore was asked, and also that of several others, and all agreed that eight hundred dollars would be a fair price.

"Then I'll take it," said Andy Dugan. "And yez can draw up th' papers as soon as ye plaze."

The transaction was just being concluded when Mr. Voup came in and called the Irish farmer to him.

"How much does Shale offer?" he asked, coldly.

"Eight hundred dollars," was Andy Dugan's reply.

"I'll give you eight hundred and twenty-five," said the rich man.

"You are too late, Mr. Voup," said Richard Shale, quietly. "The land is mine."

CHAPTER IV

THE VOUPS AT HOME

"YOURS?" shouted Mr. Voup, when Richard Shale had announced that the land offered for sale had become his property.

"Yes—I have just bought it."

"I—I—this is not fair!" stormed the rich man. "I—I tried to get here earlier, but I couldn't. I want a chance to bid on that land."

"'Tis sold to Mr. Shale," came from Andy Dugan. "'Twill do no good to talk about it, Mr. Voup. He gave me wife eight hundred dollars—an' that's two hundred more than ye said ye would give las' night, so it is!"

"Eight hundred dollars! The land is worth a thousand. Dugan, you are being swindled!"

"Sure, an' ye wanted to swindle me worse las' night," answered the Irish farmer, bluntly.

"Mr. Voup, I am not in the habit of being called a swindler," observed Mr. Shale, his face flushing. "I will have to ask you to retract those words—or I may hold you responsible in court for them."

"Well, I—ahem!—I didn't mean that exactly," stammered the rich man. "But I should have had a chance to bid on that land. I advise you to think the matter over and come to me," he added, turning to Andy Dugan; and then he left the store as rapidly as he had entered it.

"Sure, an' he makes me tired," was the farmer's comment. "Mr. Shale, th' land is yours, an' that's the end of it." And the papers were made out and duly signed by Mrs. Dugan and her husband, and they received the money.

It was not until the next day that it leaked out why Si Voup's father had wanted the land. He had contemplated putting a glue factory on it, an industry which would have depreciated the value of Mr. Shale's other holdings, and also affected some property owned by Mr. Rush. Probably the scheming rich man thought that, later on, he could buy the other land cheap,—when Mr. Shale and Mr. Rush found they could do little with it because of the proximity of the glue works.

"I am mighty glad you got that land," said Mr. Rush, to Richard Shale, when he heard about the proposed glue works. "I trust you don't use it to the detriment of the land adjoining."

"I shall use it for docking purposes, that is all," was the reply.

The effect of Mr. Voup's failure to get the land was to make him more bitter than ever against the Westmores.

"It was all that Joe Westmore's fault," said he to his wife. "I am sure he heard about what I was doing, and got Shale to interfere."

"Well, the Westmores always were a mean set," returned Mrs. Voup, looking up from the novel she was reading. "See how they continually treat Silas. It's shameful!"

"That is true. Silas says the lamp broken on the automobile is due to the Westmore boys and Fred Rush. They scared him so on the road that he had to run into some bushes."

"Then I'd make them pay for the lamp."

"The trouble is, my dear, if I try to do that, they will surely deny they were to blame."

"Wasn't somebody with Silas?"

"Yes, young Boardman. But that will be only the words of two boys against three."

"It's an outrage that young hoodlums like those Westmore boys are allowed to do as they please in this town," was Mrs. Voup's tart comment. "I think you ought to try to do something."

"I will. I'll see Mr. Westmore and Mr. Rush this evening."

Mr. Westmore shut up a little earlier than did

Mr. Rush, that evening, and walked over to the hardware store to chat with his friend. Both were talking about the sale of the land when Mr. Voup stalked in.

"Good-evening!" he said, shortly, and as soon as they had returned the salutation he went on: "I have a complaint to make to you about your boys."

"What is it now?" asked Mr. Westmore. He had had so many complaints from the rich man in the past that he was growing tired of them.

"Your boys were on their wheels the other day, and they met my son in our automobile. They ran him into some bushes and caused one of our lamps to be broken, and also damaged the car otherwise. I expect both of you to pay for the damage done."

"Mr. Voup, Joe told me about that," answered Mr. Westmore. "And the fault is on the other side. Your boy attempted to run my boys and Fred Rush down."

"Nonsense!"

"That's the way Fred tells it," put in the hardware dealer. "And I believe my son."

"Your boys broke that lamp and scratched up my auto, and you'll pay for it!" cried Mr. Voup, hotly.

"Not a cent will we pay," answered Mr. Westmore. "At least, I won't."

"Neither will I," added Mr. Rush. "By the way," he added, "did Si tell you anything about running down a young man on the road near the brook, and nearly killing him?"

"What?" cried the rich man, much startled. "What are you talking about?"

"You ask your son and find out. Most likely he knows more about it than anybody else."

"You are talking in riddles to me."

"Well, you ask Si," said Mr. Rush. "The young man who was knocked down—a stranger here—is very anxious to find the chap who did the trick."

"Humph! When was this?"

"The day your lamp was broken. My son and the Westmore boys picked the young man up. He was unconscious, and said an auto had knocked him down. Your auto was the only machine on the road at the time."

"Ha! I see how it is! You want to fasten this crime on my son! Can you prove he did it?"

"I have nothing more to say," was Mr. Rush's answer.

"Will you pay for the lamp or not?"

"Not a cent, Mr. Voup."

"Do you want me to sue you in court?"

"If you do, I'll have your son arrested for reckless driving."

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Voup, and, finding that he could get no satisfaction from the hardware dealer or the flour-and-feed merchant, he walked from the store. He went straight home and asked for his son.

"He has gone out—I don't know where he is," said Mrs. Voup. She was so wrapped up in her novel-reading and her social affairs that she paid little attention to Si. This was one reason why he was so wayward,—lacking a mother's watchful influence.

Mr. Voup remained up until eleven o'clock, waiting for Si, who was off playing pool with several particular cronies. When the lad came in he smelt strongly of cigarettes.

"Silas, step into the library," said his father, and, wondering what was up, the youth did so.

"I'm dead tired," he yawned. "Anything special?"

"Where have you been?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular. I met some of the boys and stayed out with them, that's all."

"I want to know the truth about a report I heard this evening," continued Mr. Voup, as he closed the library door. "The Westmore boys and that Rush boy have raised a report that you ran down a young man the other day and nearly killed him."

At these words Si leaped to his feet from the chair into which he had dropped. His face turned deadly pale.

"Why, I—er—do they say I knocked that fellow down?" he stammered.

"So I understand. I heard nothing before. You said nothing."

"It—it isn't so—that is—I—er—What did they say, anyhow?" Si scarcely knew how to go on.

In a few brief words Mr. Voup related all he knew of the affair on the road.

"And is that all?" asked the youth. "Didn't anybody see the fellow knocked down?"

"I don't think so."

"Then they can't hold me for it!" cried Si, and his face showed his relief.

"But I want you to tell me the truth, Silas," answered his father.

"Are you going to the man, if I do?"

"We'll—ahem!—I think not. If he got in your way and you couldn't help striking him, why—ahem!—I think it was his own fault."

"It was his fault!" burst out the boy, eagerly. "He got right in the middle of the road, and wouldn't turn out, even when I blew the horn as hard as I could. I tried to stop the machine, but I was on the hill and I couldn't. I didn't knock him

down, merely shoved him to one side. He yelled at me after I passed, and shook his fist at me. He wasn't hurt a bit. You can ask Ike Boardman," continued Si, for this was the tale he and Ike had concocted to tell, if it was brought to light that the Voup machine had collided with Al Milton. In secret Si had made some inquiries and learned that Milton was not seriously injured.

"Tell me all about it," said Mr. Voup, and then Si told the story to suit himself. He added that he had heard that the Westmores, Fred, and Link, had come to the injured young man's assistance.

"They'd like to put this off on me, and help that young fellow to get heavy damages," he continued. "That's why I tried to keep it quiet."

"Yes! yes! keep it quiet by all means!" acquiesced his parent. "I am sure it was not your fault. You had better tell the Boardman boy to keep quiet, too."

"I have told him already. If that Milton fellow comes to me, I'll tell him I don't know anything about it. I don't know whether it was him I hit, or somebody else. He may be a trickster, trying to get damages out of us because we are rich."

"Quite right!" answered Mr. Voup, eagerly. "No, don't say a word. I don't want to let any trickster get in on me!" And thus he tried to

ease his conscience into believing that he was doing right in shielding his son. But deep down in his heart he knew that Si was in the wrong, and that his son ought to go and square himself with Al Milton. The better to shield Si, he suggested that the lad visit some relatives in a distant town for a few days, and to this the boy agreed, and went off the next morning, taking Ike Boardman with him.

On the day that Si and Ike left Lakeport, Paul Shale had occasion to cross the lake on an errand for his folks. He went in his uncle's sloop, the *Sprite*, the craft that had played such an important part in the boat races. He invited half a dozen boys to go along, and they accepted the invitation. The crowd included the Westmores, Fred, Link, big and lazy Bart Mason, and Matt Roscoe, a youth who was as full of fun as can be imagined.

"Say, this just suits me," observed Bart Mason, as he found a comfortable seat on the deck of the sloop. "I could sail all day like this."

"Provided he didn't have to help run the boat," added Matt Roscoe. "The only work Bart really loves is to feed himself."

"You go on and air yourself!" grunted the big youth. "All you care to do is to make jokes."

"Really?" simpered Matt, in girlish fashion. "Say, have some nuts to crack?" he asked, dipping a hand deep down in one of his pockets.

"Don't care if I do," said Bart, quickly, for he loved nuts.

"All right, then. Why is a crow like an oyster?"

"Eh?" and Bart stared at Matt in bewilderment.

"I said, Why is a crow like an oyster?"

"Thought you were going to give me some nuts?"

"So I am. That's one of 'em. Can you crack it?" And Matt's face looked the picture of innocence.

"Sold!" cried Fred. "You might have known Matt was up to one of his tricks, Bart."

"Huh! that's a poor joke," grumbled the big youth. He shifted his seat slightly, to make himself a bit more comfortable.

"That's a strange question, anyhow," came from Link. "Why is a crow like an oyster? What's the answer, Matt?"

"The answer?" repeated the fun-loving youth. "Oh, that's easy."

"Well, tell us."

"Why, neither of them wears a full-dress suit, and both of 'em have to eat to live," was the calm reply.

And then a roar of laughter went up, in which even Link and Bart had to join.

"Stung!" murmured the carpenter's son. "But I'll pay you back."

"And so will I," added Bart.

CHAPTER V

OUT ON THE LAKE

THERE was a brisk wind blowing across the lake, and, after Paul's errand on the opposite shore had been accomplished, he asked his chums if they wished to take a run up in the vicinity of Pine Island.

"We have plenty of time," he said. "And I'd like to see how the old camping-place looks."

"Suits me," replied Harry. "I always did love to be on the water, and especially in this sloop."

All of the lads voted to go up the lake, and the *Sprite* was accordingly headed in that direction. Paul remained at the tiller, with Joe to assist him if necessary, and the other lads looked to the mainsail and the jib, working with the precision that had been drilled into them during the sailing races.

The *Sprite* was a fine boat, and had cost Richard Shale considerable money. Her lines were graceful, and she had recently been painted from stem to stern.

"If we don't do anything else this summer, I move we get up some sailboat races," said Harry.

"That's right—don't ask me to play baseball," responded Bart, with a long-drawn sigh. "I couldn't run bases in hot weather."

"Just what you need—to run some of the fat off you!" cried Link.

"You ought to run a couple of miles every day," added Matt. "Why don't you try it, Bart? I'd love to watch you."

"Not much! You can run yourself," grumbled the heavy youth. "I am going to take it easy this summer."

"Some of the boys are going away," said Fred. "Walter Bannister and Frank Pemberton are going to the seashore, and Andy Carr and Henry Hancock are going down east somewhere."

"Yes, and Kyle Fenton is going to Europe with a rich aunt," added Joe. "We'd have hard work getting a good nine together, I'm thinking."

"I wonder if Si Voup will try to organize another club," remarked Paul. "Maybe he'll do it—if he finds out we have dropped out."

"The league won't take him in—trust George Dixon for that," came from Fred. "George told me that the Brookside boys were done with Voup and Boardman, and wanted nothing more to do with them."

"I haven't seen Ike out in his motor boat this

season," said Link. "He and Si used to go out a good deal."

"The motor boat is being repaired," answered Harry. "Ike will have her out soon,—and then we can look out, if we don't want to be run down."

"If he runs into me I'll knock him sky-high!" exclaimed Matt. "I am through with putting up with Si Voup and Ike Boardman's bullying manners."

As the boys passed up the lake they caught sight of a rowboat in which sat an elderly man and a girl.

"There is Joel Runnell and his daughter Cora!" cried Harry.

"Boat ahoy!" cried Fred, and waved his cap. "How do you do?"

"How are you, boys?" cried the old hunter, with a broad smile on his face. "Enjoying yourself?"

"We are," answered Joe. "How are you?" he added, to Cora Runnell.

"Oh, I'm real well," answered the girl, blushing prettily. "Getting ready for some more races?"

"Not exactly."

"Where are you bound?" asked Fred.

"Across the lake, to do some shopping," answered Joel Runnell. "By the way," he went on, "did you hear the news?"

"Oh, papa, now don't say anything!" interposed Cora Runnell, and blushed deeply.

"It ain't nothing to be ashamed of, Cora," answered the old hunter.

"What is it?" asked Paul.

"An old aunt of Cora's died two weeks ago, and she left Cora all her property—a little cottage at Cresco, and about a thousand dollars in the bank."

"Good!" cried Joe.

"We are going to give up our old place in the woods, and move to the cottage," went on the old hunter. "It will be a nice change for Cora, because it was lonely at the old place."

"We'll have to stop some day and see you," said Harry.

"You'll all be welcome!" cried Cora; and then the two boats separated, and the boys resumed their sail up the lake.

"She's a splendid girl, and I'm glad she got the cottage and the money," observed Fred. "Cresco is a growing place, and the property is bound to increase in value."

"Better propose to Cora, Fred, before the other fellows get ahead of you," cried Matt, slyly. "I shouldn't wonder but that Joe would prove to be a powerful rival."

"Huh! I'm not proposing to any girl!" cried the stout youth, growing red in the face.

"And neither am I," added Joe, whose face was equally flushed. "All the same, Cora Runnell is a splendid girl," he added, with spirit.

The wind was steadily increasing, and presently the boys found it advisable to take in the jib, and also take a reef in the mainsail.

"I'm afraid, if we run all the way up to the island, we'll have work getting back," announced Paul, after a long look at the sky. "The wind is going to be dead against us."

"I didn't expect to stay out late," answered Link. "I am afraid, if I do, my folks will worry about me."

"Let us turn back," suggested Fred. "We can run in the direction of Brookside, and then tack down to Lakeport."

This was agreed on, and the course of the *Sprite* was changed. As soon as they started to tack they felt the breeze keenly. It was growing stronger every minute, and the whitecaps were commencing to show all around them.

"Are we going to have a storm?" asked Bart, rather anxiously. He had on three occasions been out in storms and gotten drenched to the skin, and he did not wish to repeat the experience.

"I don't think it will rain," answered Paul. "But I must say I don't like too much wind."

"Here comes the *Gem!*" cried Harry, presently, and he pointed down the lake, to where a fair-sized yacht was laboring in the wind.

"Is Mr. Felding at the wheel?" asked Fred, for the gentleman named was, as my old readers know, the owner of the approaching craft.

"Yes," answered Link, who was gazing through the marine glasses of which the sloop boasted. "He has several other folks with him. I think one of them is Mr. Corsen, and, yes, his daughter Violet is along, too."

"They are putting about!" cried Matt. "I guess they don't like this wind any more than we do."

"Oh, I guess the *Gem* can weather any storm on this lake," answered Paul. "You must remember that Mr. Felding is a crack yachtsman—no better on the lake. He'd know just what to do, no matter how hard it blew."

Rapidly the *Gem* came closer, and then swung around on a course parallel to that being taken by the *Sprite*.

"Ahoy! On board the *Gem!*" cried Joe. "Going to race us?"

"Sure thing!—if you desire it!" answered Mr. Felding, heartily.

"Not in this blow!" cried Paul.

"Sorry then, I'll have to leave you behind," went on the owner of the yacht, as his craft began to forge ahead.

"Aren't you afraid you'll lose your mast?" asked Fred, as he saw the stick bend in the fierce wind.

"I'm watching it," was the yachtsman's reply, and then he spoke to a sailor who was on board, and this hand commenced to reef the mainsail a bit closer.

Mr. Corsen and his daughter were on the deck watching those on the sloop, and both waved their hands gayly. All the boys took off their caps to Violet.

"We are going to Europe soon!" shouted the little miss. "Don't you wish you were going, too?"

"Oh, I don't know," answered Harry. "I'd like to see this country first."

"We are going to have a celebration at our place before we go," went on Violet. "Some of papa's friends are coming. We are going to have a band, and some fireworks, and lots of cake and ice-cream, and other good things!" And the little girl's face glowed in anticipation of the gala occasion.

"Violet, you mustn't brag," said her father,

gently. "Perhaps it won't be such a wonderful affair after all."

"Oh, I know it will be!" cried the little miss. "We have just been getting the fireworks from Bralham. We've got them here, in big pasteboard boxes."

"You had better look out that the fireworks don't get wet," answered Fred. "If they do, they won't go off."

"I'm taking care of that," answered Munroe Corsen; and then the two boats parted, and the ever-increasing wind made further conversation impossible.

"Well, I'd not mind a trip to Europe myself," said Bart, resting his cheek on his hand. "Think of spending months in doing nothing but ride around and enjoy yourself!"

"I suppose the Corsen mansion will be shut up during their absence," was Link's comment.

"Yes, they'll leave only a caretaker in charge, that's all," answered Bart.

"What will they do with their horses, and their boat, and their automobile?" asked Joe.

"Leave 'em all behind, I reckon," answered Paul.

"What sport it would be if we could use the auto," said Harry, with a sigh.

"Don't you dare to suggest it," said his brother,

quickly. "Mr. Corsen has done enough for us. I don't believe in imposing on good nature."

"Oh, I'll not say a word; don't fear, Joe."

"Automobiling is great!" said Matt. "I was over at Rockledge last week, and went out in a car my uncle owns. He runs it himself, and we covered about sixty miles between lunch time and dark. Say, I never had a ride to equal it! I want father to buy a car, but he says he can't afford it."

Further talk was cut short by a gust of wind that came tearing over the surface of the lake. It struck the *Sprite* on the starboard quarter, and almost bowled her over.

"Down with that sail!" cried Paul, as he swung the tiller over. "Be lively now, or we'll crack our stick!"

The mainsail came down with a bang, and was quickly stowed away. Heavy clouds had drifted over the sun, and the sky took on an angry look.

"Wish we were safe back at our dock," said Harry, in a low voice, to Fred. "The wind seems to be getting worse every minute."

For fully five minutes the wind tore across the lake, whipping the waves into a foam. Looking ashore, the lads saw the trees bend to the gale. The water flew up all over the deck of the *Sprite*, and it was impossible to keep dry.

"Head her out, or you'll get on the rocks!" cried Joe, when the gale was at its height.

"That is what I am trying to do," answered Paul. "Put up the jib. I can't manage her without some sail."

The jib was again hoisted, and they stood out into the lake. In a few minutes they were within a hundred yards of another craft.

"That's the *Gem!*" cried Matt. "And she isn't any better off than we are."

"I think the wind is going down a little," said Bart. The peril of the situation had aroused him from his usual laziness.

"See! see!" came suddenly from Fred. "What in the world can that mean?"

He pointed to the *Gem,* and as he did so a loud cry arose from the deck of the yacht. Then came a flash of fire, followed by several others, and suddenly a rocket came hissing over the water, directly across the bow of the *Sprite.*

"It's those fireworks!" yelled Joe. "They have caught fire somehow, and are going off!"

CHAPTER VI

FIGHTING FIREWORKS

Joe was right, the fireworks being carried on board the yacht had in some manner become ignited, and were now going off at a lively rate. Added to this, the wind had caught the sparks and was sending them whirling around the craft in all directions, threatening to set the *Gem* on fire.

"Help! help!" came from the yacht, in the voice of Munroe Corsen. And to this call were speedily added the shrieks of little Violet.

"We've got to do something!" exclaimed Harry. "Paul, throw her over and get closer."

"I don't want to run the yacht down," answered Paul. Nevertheless, he shifted the tiller, so that the sloop might range alongside the larger boat.

To do anything in such a high wind was dangerous, and nobody realized this more than did the boys. Yet they did not falter, for all thought a great deal of Mr. Corsen and his daughter, and also liked Mr. Felding.

The fireworks continued to go off at a lively rate,

and several rockets whizzed across the deck of the sloop, followed by the balls from some Roman candles. Then came a loud report from an aerial bomb that hit the bow of the *Sprite*.

"Look out, or somebody will get killed!" ejaculated Fred, and dodged behind the mast as several balls of colored fire went sailing close by.

The owner of the yacht had been compelled to leave the wheel, and the craft had now lost headway and was drifting around helplessly in the wind. The *Sprite* shot past, but the distance between the two boats was ten or twelve feet.

"Can't you come closer?" cried Munroe Corsen, anxiously.

"Catch the boathook!" called back Joe.

He had snatched up a hook attached to a stout rope, and now sent the iron out over the water in the direction of the *Gem*. It was caught by a sailor and made fast to the bow. The slack was quickly taken in until the bowsprit of the yacht overlapped the stern of the sloop.

"Now is your chance!" cried Harry, and leaped out on the overhanging bowsprit. Then he made a spring to the forward deck of the *Gem*.

Another explosion, this time among some pieces known as "flower-pots," had scattered fire in all directions. He saw Mr. Corsen fighting some sparks

THE BOYS QUICKLY ASSISTED THE RICH MAN AND HIS DAUGHTER TO THE DECK OF THE SLOOP.—*Page 55.*

that had landed on his own shoulders, and on the dress of his daughter. Violet was in terror, and as Harry reached her the little miss fell into his arms.

"Better get to our boat—I'll help you!" cried Harry.

"Save Violet—never mind me," answered the rich gentleman. His whole anxiety was centered on his child.

Fred and Link had followed Harry to the deck of the yacht. They brought with them buckets of water and dashed them over the fireworks. Bart came after them and managed to kick a quantity of blazing and squirming pinwheels overboard.

With Harry's assistance Mr. Corsen managed to reach the bowsprit of the yacht. Joe was waiting for them, and the boys quickly assisted the rich man and his daughter to the deck of the sloop.

"Throw the fireworks overboard!" shouted Mr. Felding.

This was not as easy as it might seem, for it was dangerous to approach the mass, which was exploding at a great rate. The sailors on the yacht were panic-stricken, and scarcely knew what they were doing. One was going to leap overboard, but was restrained by a companion.

"Haven't you got something to throw over the stuff?" asked Link. "A tarpaulin, or a hatch?"

"Yes! yes!" answered the owner of the yacht, and he pointed out a heavy canvas. This was used, and also the top of a hatchway, and then more water was dashed on the burning and exploding mass. The excitement continued for full five minutes longer, but then the explosions came to an end, and what was left of the fireworks was thrown overboard. Two or three little fires had started up on the *Gem,* but these were readily extinguished.

"I—I reckon we are all right now!" gasped Mr. Felding, when the last of the fire was out. "That was a great time, wasn't it?" he added, with a shudder.

"It certainly was," answered Fred. "Are you hurt?"

"Got a cheek singed from a rocket, that's all. How about you, boys?"

Everybody had a few burns and blisters, but nobody was hurt seriously, for which they were thankful. The boys climbed back to the deck of the *Sprite.* The wind was shifting, and came in puffs, and it was deemed best to cut the boats apart once more.

"Do you wish to go back on board the *Gem,* or will you stay here and let us take you home?" asked Paul of Munroe Corsen.

"It it's all the same, we'll stay here," was the

reply. "You are bound for Lakeport, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir, and we'll take you right to your dock if you say so," answered the skipper of the *Sprite*.

"I'll be much obliged if you will," said Mr. Corsen.

The owner of the *Gem* was apprised of the arrangement, and said he would follow the other boat to the Corsen dock. Soon each craft was on the way.

It was found that Mr. Corsen had burned one hand, although not severely. Violet's hair had caught fire, and she was suffering mostly from shock. She was very pale, and trembled from head to foot, even though her father and the boys did all in their power to quiet her.

"How did the fire start?" asked Joe.

"It was my fault," said Violet, before her father could answer. "I lit a piece of punk, just to see it burn in the wind, and when the boat gave a lurch the punk broke off and dropped right in the fireworks. I tried to get it, but before I could it set fire to a piece of paper, and then, before I knew it, something exploded and scared me almost to death!"

"It was certainly a lively time while it lasted," said Fred. "It's a good thing it didn't set the yacht on fire."

"You won't have any fireworks for that celebration now," added Bart. "And perhaps you won't want any."

"No! no! Don't get any more of the horrid things, papa!" cried Violet.

"I think I'll cut out fireworks," answered Munroe Corsen, gravely. "We can have music, and that will be enough."

Despite the wind, Paul and his chums managed to beat their way up to the Corsen dock, and there the rich gentleman and his daughter landed. The *Gem* stood up the shore for her own landing-place.

"Will you boys come up to the house?" asked Mr. Corsen.

"Thank you, but I think I'll get home," said Harry. "It is growing late." And the other boys said they would also have to go home.

"I am very thankful for what you lads did for me," said Munroe Corsen, warmly. "And I am sure Violet is thankful, too."

"Indeed I am!" said that miss, speaking for herself. "It was splendid of you to put out the fire."

"We didn't do so much," said Fred, modestly.

"Not half as much as you've done for us," added Joe.

"Well, I trust to see you again before I start for Europe," went on the rich gentleman. And then

he took Violet to the mansion, set in a grove of trees some distance away.

"It's a good thing we chanced along," remarked Matt, when the *Sprite* was on her way to Lakeport proper. "If we hadn't helped them they might have had serious trouble. The sailors on the yacht didn't seem to know what to do, and Mr. Felding was little better off."

"The explosion of the fireworks took them all by surprise," returned Bart. "Well, it was enough to surprise anybody."

By the time the proper dock was gained the wind had somewhat subsided, so a landing was made with ease, and the sloop tied up. As Bart stepped ashore, Matt followed, holding something in his hand.

"What's that?" questioned Joe.

"It's marked 'Den of Snakes,'" answered the fun-loving youth. "I picked it up from among the fireworks. I reckoned Mr. Corsen didn't want it, so I brought it along."

"Is it unburnt?"

"Sure."

"What are you going to do with it, Matt?"

"I don't know yet. But I'll have some sport, just wait and see."

"Don't you blow anybody up," said Harry, warningly.

"I'd like to scare Si Voup and Ike Boardman with it."

"Well, be careful," said Bart. "Sometimes tricks don't turn out as intended."

"Say, Bart, want some more nuts to crack?" questioned Matt, solemnly.

"Oh, you shut up!" answered Bart, crustily, and walked off, followed by Link and Paul.

Matt paired off with Fred, and the Westmore boys followed. The lads had to pass the Boardman homestead, and as they did this they saw Mr. Boardman in earnest conversation on a side porch with Mr. Voup.

"By jinks! I'll do it!" cried Matt, and at once pulled from its paper covering the piece of fireworks he had saved from the yacht.

"What are you going to do?" asked Fred.

"Wake up old Boardman and old Voup!"

"You keep out of trouble!" cried Joe, coming forward. "Please remember, that those men hate us like poison already."

"Yes, and they played a mean trick on me once, and I am going to get back at 'em," returned Matt.

The piazza occupied by the two men had a heavy railing around it, and was partly overgrown with vines. Watching his chance, Matt crept up and shoved the bit of fireworks between the railing and

an empty bench. Then he struck a match and set fire to the fuse of the piece.

"Yes, I think it is a good investment," Mr. Voup was saying.

"Well, I don't believe in wildcat mines," answered Mr. Boardman. "Still, if the money—— For gracious' sake! What is that?"

Mr. Boardman gave a sudden leap of terror, and so did Mr. Voup. With a strange hissing of fire, the piece Matt had set off went into action. From it squirmed a dozen or more "snakes" of various colors, and they whipped across the piazza in lifelike fashion.

"Snakes!" screamed Mr. Boardman. "Take them away! I don't want to be bit!" He had a mortal dread of all kinds of reptiles.

Mr. Voup was equally alarmed, and in his haste to leave the piazza he stumbled over a settee and fell flat. To save himself, he caught Mr. Boardman by the coat-tails.

"Don't leave me!" he bawled. "Save me!"

"Let me go!" screamed the other man. "I don't want to be bit!"

There was a wild scramble by both men, and in the meantime the fiery snakes glided here, there, and everywhere. Some went over the men's feet, causing them to kick out in a lively fashion.

"Say, this is great!" cried Harry, as he and the others watched the scene from a distance. "They are seeing snakes, and no mistake!"

The commotion on the piazza brought Mrs. Boardman and a hired girl out to see what was the matter. As the lady of the house opened the hallway door, one of the snakes shot directly towards her.

"O dear! What is that? A snake! Oh, I'll be poisoned!" she moaned, and sank back into the arms of the hired girl.

"Sure an' I don't want any snakes!" cried the girl, in fright. "Maybe they're poisonous!" And dropping her mistress, she sped back into the mansion.

"This is a trick!" commenced Mr. Boardman, as he caught sight of the piece of fireworks, which was almost burnt out. "A trick! If I knew——"

Bang! went the piece, and with a final shower of sparks that sent Mr. Voup and Mr. Boardman leaping from the piazza, the "Den of Snakes" became a thing of the past, and the piazza was left in gloom.

"Who did that? I demand to know who did it?" stormed Mr. Boardman, rushing around the corner of the house.

"It's a boy's trick! Catch the rascal!" added Mr. Voup, as he joined in the chase after the offender.

But Matt had taken himself away, and so had his chums. They ran with a will, and were soon at a safe distance. All laughed heartily over the prank.

"Mum's the word," said Matt, as the boys were separating.

"That's all right," answered Fred. "If only they don't hear about the fireworks on the yacht, and the part we played there. Maybe they'll put two and two together, and find us out."

"I hadn't thought about that," returned Matt, seriously.

CHAPTER VII

THE AUTOMOBILE RACES

The boys were somewhat anxious, but nothing came of the prank that had been played, for the reason that the next morning Mr. Voup left town on business, taking Mr. Boardman with him.

"We are lucky," said Fred. "Had they heard about the fireworks on the yacht they would surely have suspected us."

"Well, you've got to take a chance, if you want any fun in this life," said Matt, coolly.

The boys had not forgotten about the automobile races that were to come off at Cresco, and nearly all of them arranged to take in the affair. Cresco was some distance above the head of the lake, but there was a fairly good road all the way, and the boys decided to go on their bicycles.

"It wouldn't be any trip at all if we had an auto," said Joe, with something of a sigh. "My, how we could spin along!"

"Joe, I really think you've got the autoing fever!" cried his brother.

"Well, wouldn't you like to have a machine, Harry?"

"Sure. But I don't see myself getting one. Why, a good touring-car is worth at least fifteen hundred to two thousand dollars."

"We might get a runabout second-hand. I saw one advertised for two hundred and fifty dollars."

"Humph! I'd not care for such a rattletrap! Besides, where are you going to get the two hundred and fifty dollars?"

"I don't know. But, just the same, I'd like to get a machine and learn how to run it," concluded Joe.

All the boys had studied the posters with care. There was a partial list of entries, and among them were a few people they knew.

"Well, I never!" cried Fred. "Do you know that Si Voup has entered his car in the endurance test?"

"It's just like Si," returned Link. "I suppose he hopes to win. Well, I'll wager he'll lose."

"He ought to—such a mean fellow as he is!" grumbled Fred.

Bright and early on the day set for the races the boys started out from Lakeport on their wheels. Each carried his lunch with him, and also some spending-money with which to buy some fruit, or

something to drink. None of them used liquor, but each was partial to ice-cream soda and root-beer.

They passed through Brookside, and at that town were joined by their old friends and rivals, George Dixon and Roy Willetts, also on their bicycles.

"It's going to be a grand affair," said George. "They've hired a city band, and the prizes are quite valuable."

On the road the lads met a number of automobiles, and by the time Cresco was reached the road was swarming with machines of all kinds, from the diminutive one-cylinder runabouts, to the big six-cylinder seven-passenger touring-cars.

"There goes Mr. Corsen's machine!" cried Harry, as a large dark-green car swept by in a cloud of dust. "Say, that's going some!" he added, as he slackened up, to let the dust settle.

"Who was running the car?" questioned Fred.

"His regular man, I don't know what his name is."

There was a track for horseracing on the outskirts of Cresco, and this had been fixed up for some of the automobile races. The other races were to be over the hills surrounding the town.

The boys rode onto the racetrack on their bicycles. Automobiles were everywhere, and in the crowd they saw the Voup car, with Si and Ike on the

front seats, and two strange boys in the back. The bully gave them a cold stare, but did not deign to speak to them.

"I guess Si feels very important to-day," whispered Link.

"I suppose he has already won the race—in his mind," returned Harry.

Some races of small importance were already on, and the boys looked at these with interest. Then came the announcement of one of the big races, and the track was cleared, and six machines lined up for the start.

"We can't see here very well," said Joe. "Let us go to another part of the field," and the others followed his advice. This brought them close to where the Corsen touring-car was standing. They saw that the car contained Mr. Corsen and his wife, and another lady and gentleman, besides the chauffeur.

The race was soon on, and for the next hour the boys were keenly interested in the efforts of the various drivers to secure first place in the struggle. At first a red car was in the lead, but presently a blue crept up on it, and then a green. Finally the blue car broke down, and then a black hove in sight, and the struggle was between that and the green, with the red car hovering dangerously close.

"I think the green will win!" cried Joe.

"What makes you think that?" asked his brother.

"Because the driver seems to handle his car well. See, there he goes!"

Down the homestretch came the cars, speeding at a terrific rate. The black tried its best to keep to the front, but of a sudden the green spun ahead. Then the red came sweeping in, wheel and wheel with the black.

"The green car wins!"

"It's a tie for second place!"

"No, the black is second!"

"That's right, and red comes in third!" And then the race came to a finish amid a grand yelling and a wild tooting of horns and a waving of flags and banners.

"Say, that beats a horse race all to bits!" cried Link, as he threw his cap into the air. "Wasn't it just swell?"

"When the green car went ahead I felt just as if I was at the wheel, steering it!" remarked Joe.

"That's just the way I felt!" added Fred. "Say, I can tell you, I think automobiling is the finest sport going!" he added, enthusiastically.

Following the track race came one of the endurance contests. This was the race entered by Si, and the boys saw the rich bully line up his car with

seven others. He had to carry four people, and Ike and the two strange youths remained with him.

"They are going up Raddy's Hill!" cried out Matt. "Let us go to the top and see if they get up all right."

"It's a mighty stiff hill for any auto to climb," was Link's comment. "I'll wager some of 'em don't make it."

"They won't on high gear," answered Joe.

"My! hear Joe talk!" cried Fred. "Joe, what gear would you take on a hill like that?" he questioned, quizzically.

"Low, or second," was the quick response, for Joe had made a study of how a touring-car ought to be run. "Even if you could get up on high gear, there is no sense in straining your engine," he added.

"Joe will be running a car yet," said Bart. "Just wait and see."

"If I only had the chance!" cried Joe. "I'd give 'most anything to have the use of a touring-car!"

The boys were hurrying through a crowd of people. Now Joe chanced to look up. There, close by him, on foot, was Munroe Corsen. The rich gentleman had overheard the talk.

"So you like autos, do you, Joe?" he said.

"Very much, indeed, sir!" answered the boy.

"It was a stirring race."

"Oh, it was grand!" cried Harry.

"Do you think you could learn to run a car?" went on Mr. Corsen, to the older of the Westmore lads.

"Why, yes, sir, I do," was the quick reply. "I guess the most a fellow has got to do is to keep his wits about him."

"Yes, it is necessary to be on guard constantly. But you have got to know something, too, of the mechanism of a car, so as to make small repairs."

"I once helped a fellow put on a new shoe and change an inner tire," said Joe. "And I helped him to locate the trouble with his batteries. I learned about batteries in our class in chemistry in school."

"I have learned a great deal about my car from my chauffeur, who is a very capable man," went on Munroe Corsen. "He can take the car apart and put it together again, if necessary. Of course, all men who run cars cannot do that."

"I'd learn—if I had the chance," said Joe.

"Joe is just crazy about a car!" broke in Fred. "I guess maybe the old football eleven and the base-

ball nine will have to form a new club, and get some kind of a machine."

"I see, and then you'll have the Lakeport Automobile Club," said Mr. Corsen, with a laugh. "Well, I wish you luck," and then he turned to go back to his car.

"Say, Joe, why didn't you ask him if you couldn't use his car while he is in Europe?" whispered Link. "It would be great!"

"I'll not do it," was the firm answer. "If he wants us to use his car, he'll offer it without our asking him."

"It's a valuable car," came from Fred. "If you had the use of it you'd have to be very careful. A smash-up would put us in a hole."

So the talk ran on, while the boys trundled their bicycles to the top of Raddy's Hill. This was a somewhat steep incline, with several turns.

The endurance race was on, and away shot the various cars, at first over a level road, at the end of which was a sandy stretch, where going was anything but good. Here the first of the cars, an affair painted yellow, came to grief.

"He's stalled, that's sure!" was the cry, as the yellow car went into a sandy rut and refused to come out.

The others managed to get through the sand, and

came on over a bit of road that was particularly rocky. Here one car got a cut and a blow-out, and had to run to one side for repairs. Then came a long, although not very high hill, and here one of the cars heated up, so that the engine lost power and almost stopped.

"Here they come!" was the cry, as the foot of Raddy's Hill was gained.

"Look at that!" burst from Joe's lips. "As I live, Si Voup is in the lead!"

"Yes, but the blue car is pushing him close!" added Fred.

"Yes, and the second blue car isn't so far behind," came from Link.

The three leading cars were each about fifty yards apart. The first to strike the bottom of the hill was Si Voup, and he came rushing along as if to take such an incline were easy.

"He'll make it on high speed!" was the cry.

"Not much!" answered somebody in the crowd. "No car in the bunch will do that!"

On came Si Voup's car, with the two blue ones after him. But ere a third of the climb had been covered the first blue car came down to second speed. The other tried second for a few rods, and then changed to low.

Grinning over his anticipated victory, Si Voup

kept at high speed, retarding the spark and turning the gas on to the fullest extent. The engine whirred and panted, and kept on until nearly two-thirds of the rise had been covered.

"We'll make it! We'll make it!" cried Ike Boardman.

"Sure we'll make it!" answered Si, as he cut out the muffler. "No car around here can beat me climbing hills!"

"Going to make it on high, Si?" asked one of the other lads in the car.

"Bet your life I am!" answered the bully, slangily.

But even as he spoke the car commenced to lose speed rapidly. From a rate of eighteen miles an hour the speedometer registered fifteen, then twelve, and then dropped to eight, seven, and six. Si grew alarmed, and so did his cohorts.

"Better shift to second!" cried one of the other boys. "You can't make it on high."

Si hesitated, and then, as the speedometer dropped to four miles an hour, he threw out the clutch and changed the lever to second speed. The steepest part of the hill was before him. He let in the clutch again and turned on the power. The car refused to go forward.

"He's stalled!" was the cry.

"He is going backwards!" came from several, an instant later. And the latter words proved true. Unable to gain a momentum forward, the weighty touring-car was slipping backwards down the steep hill!

CHAPTER VIII

MR. CORSEN THINKS IT OVER

"PUT on your brake!"

"Take care, or you'll back into the cars behind you!"

Such were some of the cries which arose as Si Voup's big touring-car commenced to slide backwards down Raddy's Hill. The two passengers in the tonneau stood up and looked as if they were about to leap out. Si grew pale, and so did Ike Boardman.

In the meantime one of the cars in the race had gone past the Voup machine, and was slowly but steadily climbing the hill on second gear. The next car was less than a hundred feet in the rear. It took to the extreme left of the highway, yet it was doubtful if it could pass the Voup car, for Si was slipping and sliding down the middle of the road.

The bully had jammed on his foot brake, and now he added the emergency brake. He turned on some power, and his machine gave a jerk that nearly dislocated the necks of himself and his passengers. But

progress up the hill was impossible—instead the big car continued to slip backwards.

"Take care you don't go into something!"

"Don't run into the other cars!"

"Look out for the gully at the roadside!"

The last warning was the one to interest Si the most. He was not so much afraid of bumping into something in the rear as he was of going into the deep trench that lined the highway on either side. If he went into the trench, more than likely his car would be overturned and somebody would be seriously injured.

The situation was beginning to tell on the two boys in the tonneau of the machine, and, watching his chance, one of the lads leaped to the ground, and his companion quickly followed. Ike wanted to leave, too, but hated to desert his crony.

While this was going on, Joe had been doing some rapid thinking. He and his chums were close at hand, at a point where the dangerous uphill road made a turn. He looked around and saw a number of good-sized stones lying in the trench, washed free from dirt by the last rains.

"Block the wheels, boys!" he cried to the others, and picked up one of the largest of the stones. Link did likewise, and both boys sprang to the roadway and, watching their chance, placed the stones di-

"BLOCK THE WHEELS, BOYS!" HE CRIED TO THE OTHERS.—*Page 76.*

rectly behind the back wheels of the Voup machine.

"That's the stuff!" cried Fred, and caught up another stone. Harry, Paul, and Matt came after him, and one after another the rocks were piled up, until the touring-car was brought to a standstill. It had swerved partly to one side of the highway, so the road was now clear for the other automobiles in the race. One more went by, the others finding the hill too much for them.

"Block 'em up! Block 'em up!" cried Si, when he saw the stones. "Block 'em up good!"

"They are blocked up," answered Joe, kicking the last stone into a firmer hold. "It can't slip any more, Si!"

"Reckon you are out o' th' race, son!" remarked a farmer, who had been watching the contest from a neighboring field.

"I—er—I don't know what got the matter with my car," stammered the bully.

"I guess you tried to do too much on high gear," answered Joe, quietly.

"Humph! What do you know about running a car, Joe Westmore!"

"I know that it is impossible to take a high hill on high gear, Si! The other fellows all used low gear, or second."

"Well, I—er—was going to change."

"You waited too long before you tried to change," said a man who was near. "You might have won the race if you had started to change a bit sooner."

"Say, what are we going to do?" asked Ike, gazing backwards down the steep hill. "You can't turn around here."

"I'll wait till the hill is clear, and then back down," was Si's reply. "You better go back and keep the hill clear for me," he continued.

"Do you want us to help you?" asked Joe. "If you don't, we'll go on and see the finish of the race."

"I don't want any help from you," snapped the bully. It did not enter his head to thank the other boys for what they had already done.

"Let us wait and see what Si does," whispered Fred. "We have seen enough of this race, anyhow."

A consultation was held, and Joe and his chums withdrew to the top of the hill. From a cleared spot they saw Si and his cronies talking to the farmer, who owned the field on the hill. Presently a drag of heavy brushwood was attached to the front of the automobile, and also a rope, which three of the boys and the farmer held. Then the stones were removed from the wheels, and the heavy

touring-car was allowed to slide slowly backwards down the highway. When a level stretch was reached, the drag and ropes were removed, the boys got into the car, and it was turned around and headed in the direction of Bralham.

"Si has had enough of racing—he isn't even going back to Cresco," said Paul, and he was right; the bully did not show himself on the racing grounds again.

On their wheels Joe and his chums returned to the starting-point of the race, and were in time to see a spirited finish. Then they went back to the old racetrack and looked at another race, between several runabouts. One runabout was driven by a friend, a youth who had played football on the Brookside eleven, and they were glad to see this lad come in ahead and win a prize.

"The best day's fun I've had in a long time," said Joe, when the lads were leaving the racing grounds. "Harry, we must try to get hold of an automobile somehow."

"I'm willing enough," answered his brother. "But how? Autos don't grow on bushes, like blackberries."

"Well, we've got to find some way to get one. Think of going off on a regular tour in one of those big machines!"

"Say, that would suit me down to the ground!" cried Fred. "What an outing we could have!"

"It would beat camping on Pine Island all hollow," was Link's comment.

The boys had found a booth where ice-cream soda could be had, and were regaling themselves with the stuff while talking over the possibilities of an automobiling tour. With true boyish enthusiasm they went into many details, mapping out an imaginary route, and mentioning the things to be taken along.

"But you'd have to be careful of your roads," said Fred. "It won't do to go on any kind of a road with a good auto."

"Oh, you rest assured I'd be careful of my machine," answered Joe. "They are far too valuable to be misused. I'd pick out good roads, and I'd not do any speeding unless I knew it was absolutely safe."

So the talk ran on, as the boys disposed of their ice-cream sodas and some fancy cakes Paul purchased. The booth had several sides to it, and the lads did not know that on one of the sides, hidden by a board partition, stood Munroe Corsen, who had come up to get some glasses of soda to take to his automobile. The rich gentleman listened with in-

terest to all the boys said, and, as he walked away, his face became a study.

"I suppose I could do it," he said to himself. "Those lads have done me some great favors. They saved Violet from those kidnappers, and aided us to escape from the fireworks, and Harry Westmore once saved Violet from a bull. I really owe those lads a good deal. And the touring-car will do no good to anybody being stored in a garage while we are in Europe. I must look into this before I go away,—and have a talk with Mr. Westmore and Mr. Rush."

As the boys were passing down a side street of Cresco, they were hailed by Joel Runnell, who stood in the dooryard of a neat-looking cottage. As they came up, Cora Runnell also appeared.

"Is this your new home?" asked Joe, as he and the others tipped their caps to the girl.

"This is the spot," answered the old hunter. "What do you think of it?"

"It is very nice," said Fred. "I hope you like it."

"Oh, we do!" answered Cora Runnell. "It is so much better than living down in the woods."

"I suppose that is true," said Joe.

"We'd be perfectly happy if it wasn't for a bit o' trouble we are having," said Joel Runnell.

"Seems like we could never git just settled," he added, with a sigh.

"What trouble is that?" questioned Harry, quickly.

"Oh, dad, you ought not to worry the boys about that," interposed Cora.

"They might as well know it as not," said the old hunter. "It's trouble with Mr. Boardman."

"Why, not over that old note, I hope!" cried Fred, referring to a debt the old hunter had once owed Mr. Boardman.

"Oh, no, that was paid long ago. It's about this cottage. As I told you, the place was left to Cora by her aunt. Now Boardman claims some kind of an interest in the property."

"What interest?" demanded Joe.

"I ain't no lawyer, and I can't explain it exactly. But Boardman says the interest is worth three hundred dollars, and if we don't pay it he'll go to law and sell us out."

"But we can pay—if we have to," put in the girl, quickly. "My aunt left me enough money."

"I'd not pay Mr. Boardman a cent unless he proves his claim," said Paul. "He may be honest enough, but he is as sharp as they make 'em. Let him show his claim in writing, or something like that."

"I think I'd consult a lawyer," added Bart.

"I don't know any lawyer in this town."

"There is Mr. Blackman. He is a good lawyer, so I've heard my father say. Why not go to him? It would be better to pay him twenty-five dollars for advice than pay Mr. Boardman three hundred that maybe isn't coming to him legally."

Joel Runnell was interested, and asked about the lawyer and where he lived. At last he said he would get advice.

"Mr. Boardman said he'd call again in a week," said the old hunter. "Before he comes I'll see Mr. Blackman, and find out what I had best do."

As my old readers know, Fred thought a good deal of Cora Runnell, and would have been perfectly willing to extend the call. But it was growing late, and the others said they had better start for Lakeport, so they left; the old hunter and his daughter wishing them a pleasant journey home.

"I hope they don't have to pay Mr. Boardman a cent," said Fred, as the boys wheeled along the forest road leading to Brookside.

"Say, fellows, I guess all of you remember this spot!" cried Harry, presently.

"Well, rather!" answered several of the others. They had to shiver as they gazed at a number of

the half-burned trees and remembered the fierce forest fire that had all but cost them their lives.

"I move we take the new road into Brookside," said Joe. "George Dixon said it was in fine condition."

"Right you are!" sang out Matt, merrily. He turned to Bart. "Say, Bart, old man?"

"Well?" asked the big youth, laconically. He did not do much talking while riding a wheel.

"Want any more nuts to crack?"

"I'll crack you if you mention that again!" cried Bart.

"Come on for a race into Brookside!" called out Paul. "The first boy there gets a fresh ginger-snap!"

"A race it is!" answered Harry. "Come on!" And away he spun, with the others trailing after him.

CHAPTER IX

AN INVITATION ACCEPTED

"HARRY, what do you make of this?"

It was Joe who spoke. He held in his hand a note which he had just read with keen interest.

"What is it, Joe?"

"An invitation from Mr. Corsen, asking both of us to call at his home to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock for a ride in his automobile. He says to bring Fred along."

"Hurrah! That's great!" exclaimed the younger Westmore boy, flinging his cap in the air. "Oh, I hope he gives us a good long ride!"

"He says for us to make arrangements to remain away for supper."

"Then that means a long ride, Joe! Isn't it fine?" And Harry's face glowed with enthusiasm.

"He must have found out how anxious we were to go autoing," went on Joe.

"Yes, and he is doing this to square up for what we did when the fireworks went off."

"I don't know about that. If that was so, why

didn't he invite Paul? We were using his boat—or, rather, his uncle's."

The boys talked the invitation over, but could reach no other conclusion than that Mr. Corsen simply desired to give them a good time. Both readily received consent to accept, and then they rushed off to see Fred.

"It's just what I've been wishing for," said the stout youth. "I hope he takes us about fifty miles."

"Make it a hundred while you are at it," added Harry. "Let me see, if we are out four hours and make twenty-five miles an hour, that will be a hundred even."

"You can't make twenty-five miles an hour on the hills around the lake," answered Joe. "But we might go out Camdale way and do it."

The boys were in quite a state of excitement over the invitation, and could not resist the temptation to tell some of their friends.

"You're the lucky ones!" cried Link. "I wish I was going."

"Maybe he'll give you a ride some other time," said Harry.

"No such luck, I am afraid," answered the carpenter's son, with a sigh.

The boys washed and brushed up with care, and put on their best caps. They started for the Cor-

sen mansion early, but "hung around" the entrance to the grounds until Joe's watch pointed to the exact hour.

"It's not the thing to present yourself ahead of time," he explained.

Mr. and Mrs. Corsen were on hand, and also Violet, the latter in a new white dress with blue ribbons. All greeted the boys warmly.

"Well, are you ready for a good long ride?" asked the rich gentleman, with a smile.

"As long as you please to make it!" answered Joe. "It was very kind of you to ask us to come."

"It was, indeed!" added his brother and Fred.

"I wanted to show you what my automobile can do," said Munroe Corsen. "I'll go with you, and also my chauffeur, Larpone. If you are ready, we'll start right away."

The lads were not only ready, but anxious, for the ride, and the chauffeur was ordered to bring the big six-cylinder automobile around to the stepping-block of the mansion.

"You may take turns sitting on the front seat," said Mr. Corsen. "I'll sit in the back with the others." And it was decided that Joe should be the first to sit beside the chauffeur. Larpone was a Frenchman, but he spoke English very well.

"Now, don't get hurt!" cried little Violet, as her father told the chauffeur he might start the car.

"We'll take care of ourselves, don't fear!" answered Harry, brightly.

"Which way would you like to go?" questioned Munroe Corsen, as the automobile glided forward and out of the grounds with scarcely a sound.

"Oh, anywhere will suit me!" answered Joe.

"It's all so new, one road will be about as good as another," added Fred.

"I was thinking we might go to Brookside, and then to Washingtonville," said the owner of the car. "We can stop at the latter place for supper, and then come back to Lakeport by the way of Gardendale and Camdale."

"Why, that will be over a hundred miles!" cried Harry, who knew distances in that section quite well.

"A hundred and twelve, according to the road-book."

"Can we make it?" asked Joe.

"Oh, yes, and have plenty of time for supper," was the reply.

The boys instantly agreed that such a trip would suit them to perfection, and accordingly Munroe Corsen spoke to the chauffeur. The touring-car was turned in the direction of Brookside, and away they

sailed, up hill and down dale, at a speed that varied from twelve to twenty-five miles an hour. Larpone knew exactly how to handle the car to the best advantage, and he took pride in letting the boys, and especially Joe, see how it was done.

"The engine of the car, he is like one horse," said the French chauffeur, while speeding along. "You treat him well, he goes well; you abuse him and, presto! you can do nothing with him!"

"I believe you," replied the elder of the Westmore boys. And then he asked the chauffeur if he had seen the hill-climbing contest and noted Si Voup's handling of his car.

"Yes, I see him," was the answer. "That young man is one big fool. Some day he will break his engine to pieces—and maybe break his head, too!"

"Well, if I owned such a valuable car, I'd want to keep it in the best condition possible," said Joe.

Almost before they knew it, the automobile had reached Brookside, and they were bowling merrily through one of the principal streets.

"We will stop here for a minute," said Munroe Corsen. "I ordered a new inner tube at Dacey's. I'll see if he has it."

They halted in front of a garage, and Mr. Corsen and the chauffeur went inside. While they were

gone, two boys chanced to stroll by. They were George Dixon and Roy Willetts.

"Hello!" cried the leader of the Brookside boys. "Since when did you get an automobile?"

"Bought this yesterday," answered Harry, with a wink at the others.

"You did!" ejaculated Roy Willetts. "Say, you must be getting rich!"

"Oh, it didn't cost much—only four thousand dollars," put in Fred, bound to help the joke along.

"Four thousand! Phew!" was George Dixon's comment. "That's the price of a house and lot!"

"We're thinking of buying three of them—so that all the baseball and football players can ride," continued Joe. "Want to lend us a few hundred dollars? If you haven't got it with you, I can call this evening for the money."

"Oh, you're joking!" cried Roy Willetts. "It's not your car at all. Maybe it's Si Voup's car," he added, quickly.

"Do you think we'd go out in Si's car?" demanded Harry, indignantly.

"No, I don't," said George Dixon. "But I don't think the car is yours—not but that you may deserve to have an auto," he added, in a friendly tone.

"It is Mr. Corsen's machine," explained Joe. "He was kind enough to ask us to take a long ride with him—out Washingtonville way."

"You're in luck."

"So we think," answered Fred.

The friends continued to talk for several minutes, and during that time another automobile came into sight and ran up to the front of the garage. It contained Mr. Voup and Si.

"Say, what are you fellows doing in that machine?" cried the bully, after his father had entered the garage.

"That is our business, Si," answered Joe, coolly.

"If the owner catches you in it, he'll give you fits!"

"Will he?" asked Harry. "How do you know?"

"Because auto owners don't like other folks to get in their cars," grumbled Si.

"Maybe you don't know we've bought this car?" said Fred.

"Bought it?" roared the bully. "You? Not much! You couldn't raise money enough!" And he laughed coarsely.

"Say, Voup, that's a mean thing to say!" exclaimed George Dixon.

"I'm not talking to you, George Dixon!"

"Well, I'm talking to you. It was mean, dirt mean."

"You mustn't think, because you happen to own a car, that you are better than anybody else," added Roy Willetts. "Because, as a matter of fact, you are not half as good," he went on, with spirit.

"Ha! do you mean that for an insult?" roared Si, growing red in the face.

"You can take it as you please, Voup. You try to cut a big dash in that auto, but please remember that I haven't forgotten the mean tricks you and your cronies played, when you wanted to get in the baseball league and in the football league. I'd rather be poor and have a clean record, than have an auto and the record you've got."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Si, not knowing what else to say. "You fellows all make me sick!" And then he jumped from his car and followed his father into the garage.

"Did you ever see his match!" murmured Fred.

"No, and I never want to," answered George Dixon. "It's a wonder the fellows of Lakeport don't drum him out of town."

"It's his father's money that helps him to stay," answered Harry. "Mr. Voup uses his money freely, and that is what counts with a good many folks. But some day Si will get into some trouble

that all his money can't help him out of,—just wait and see."

George Dixon and his chum moved on, and a minute later Munroe Corsen and the chauffeur came from the garage with a new inner tube, which was stowed away in a box under one of the seats. Both the owner of the car and the driver were smiling grimly, and they looked meaningly at each other.

"I doubt if Dacey will want to make any more repairs for Mr. Voup," remarked Munroe Corsen, as the touring-car moved off once more.

"He is very angry, and perhaps he has a right to be," answered the chauffeur. "For myself, I am of a thought that Mr. Dacey is an honorable workman."

"I think so myself," said Mr. Corsen, and then, noting the look of inquiry on the faces of the boys, he added: "I suppose you saw Mr. Voup go into the garage?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"He came to complain about a bill. Mr. Dacey, it seems, charged him six dollars for fixing a lamp, straightening out a fender, and doing some other work on the car, and Mr. Voup thought the charge ought to be about two dollars. He raised a terrible row."

"Well, wasn't the work worth it?" asked Harry.

"According to Dacey's man it was worth more—in fact, the man said that in a big city they would charge fifteen or twenty dollars for the same repairs—and I think they would myself. I think Mr. Voup was very unreasonable, and he is unwise, too, for if Dacey refuses to do any more work for him, he will have to go a long distance to have it done. Good repair shops are scarce around here."

"I guess those are the damages Si sustained when he tried to run us down on the road," said Fred.

"Did he try to do that?" asked Munroe Corsen, with interest.

"He did," went on the stout youth, and told the particulars, and also told about Al Milton.

"He is a bad boy, and will come to a bad end, unless he is taken in hand," was the rich gentleman's comment.

On they rolled, along the country roads and through several small villages. They had to climb one long hill, and, when at the top, they stopped long enough to take a look around at the scenery.

"Oh, this is the best ever!" cried Joe, enthusiastically. "What a grand thing it would be to take a tour in an auto."

"You would like it, would you?" queried Munroe Corsen.

"I'd like it better than anything else in the world!"

"Better than playing baseball this summer?"

"I think so. It would be more of a novelty."

"Yes, it would certainly be a novelty. What about running a car, though? Do you think you could learn to do that—or would you want a chauffeur?"

"Oh, I would want to learn to run it!"

"So would I!" added Fred and Harry.

"That would be more than half the fun," explained Joe. "Of course, I'd want somebody to go with me at first."

"Yes, that would be the only way to do, until you had mastered the running thoroughly, and learned how to make minor repairs."

"I think I could learn quickly," went on Joe. "I take such an interest in the thing."

"Well, when a person is thoroughly interested, it is generally easy to learn," was Munroe Corsen's comment.

CHAPTER X

AN OFFER OF AN AUTOMOBILE

"WELL, we have covered fifty-seven miles," remarked Harry, as the touring-car came to a halt in front of the Washingtonville Hotel.

"Yes, and we did it in less than two hours and a half," added his brother, consulting his watch. "That beats bicycling all hollow, doesn't it?"

"If I did that on my wheel I'd not have any feet left to stand on," was Fred's comment.

"I trust the ride didn't tire you," said Munroe Corsen.

"Not in the least," answered Harry.

"We'll go in here, wash up a bit, and have supper," went on the rich gentleman. "I telephoned from Dacey's that we were coming, so we shall not have to wait for the meal."

The boys got out, and the car was run around to the hotel garage by the chauffeur, who then went in a side room to get his own meal. The lads were soon ready for the repast, and followed Mr. Corsen to the large dining-room.

"Here is your table, sir," said the head waiter, when the rich gentleman had mentioned his name, and he led the party to one near a wide window overlooking a flower-garden.

A full course dinner had been ordered, beginning with soup and fish, and ending with ice-cream and cake, and it is perhaps needless to say that the boys did full justice to all that was set before them. Each of the three had been brought up to observe good table manners, and this Mr. Munroe noted with some satisfaction, for he was used to good society and perfect table etiquette. They took their time over the meal, but did not linger much longer than was necessary.

"If you will excuse me a moment, I will get a few cigars," said the gentleman, after they had left the dining-room. "I have a weakness for smoking after a meal. None of you smoke, I believe."

"No, sir," answered Harry.

"I am glad to hear it. Time enough when you are men—if you ever want to smoke at all."

Munroe Corsen left them, and the three lads walked out on the porch of the hotel, and then down to where the chauffeur had already brought around the touring-car. As Joe was about to get into the tonneau—it being Fred's turn to sit on the front seat—he noticed a young man on the other side of

the street. The young man had his hat far back on his head and was staggering along in anything but a respectable fashion.

"Why, see!" cried the boy. "Isn't that Al Milton, the young fellow Si Voup knocked down?"

"It certainly is!" answered his brother. "What's the matter with him?"

"He has been drinking, that is what's the matter," answered Fred, in disgust.

"What a shame!" murmured Harry. "I thought he appeared like a nice sort."

"So he did," went on Joe. "Maybe he is sick."

"He is not sick—he drink too much," said the chauffeur.

"How do you know?"

"I just see him, over on the corner. He comes from a saloon and bumps into me. I was going to make him beg my pardon, but he cannot, for he can scarcely stand. He is a beast!"

"What a shame!" murmured Harry. Then of a sudden he looked at his brother and Fred. "Say, do you suppose he was under the influence of drink when he was run down by the auto?"

"It might be so," answered his brother, slowly.

"I didn't smell liquor on him that day," said Fred. "But he might have had enough in him to

bewilder him. And in that case, maybe Si wasn't so much to blame, after all."

"It's too bad!" sighed Joe. "He really did seem like a nice fellow. It's queer what a hold liquor does get on some people!" And he shook his head gravely. By this time the young man across the way had reeled around a corner out of sight.

It was a clear evening, and with all the lamps lit to show the way, the big touring-car started on the return to Lakeport, passing through Gardendale, Camdale, and several other villages of less importance. On one of the straight, level stretches Joe was allowed to guide the car, the chauffeur sitting beside him, to tell him what to do. It thrilled the lad through and through to get his hands on the steering-wheel.

"It's great!" he murmured. "Simply great! Say, I could stay out all night doing this!"

"Want to become a regular joy rider, eh?" returned Fred, with a laugh.

"Well, you know what I mean, Fred. It's just splendid sport, to sit there and have such a powerful car under your control."

"Yes, if it is under your control, Joe. What if it tried to get away from you?"

"I'd shut off the power and put on the brakes—nobody could do more than that."

"Right you are," answered Munroe Corsen, with a laugh. "A good rule of the road is: When in doubt, don't take a chance, but slow up or stop. If more observed that rule, there would be fewer accidents."

"I guess most of the accidents come from speeding," observed Harry.

"You are right. The speed law is continually violated, and cars are run at forty and fifty miles an hour when they should run at twelve to twenty miles. This car can make fifty miles and more, but I never allow my man to run over thirty at the most, and then only when there is a clear, open road ahead."

"I'd like to take a long trip, but take my time about it," answered Joe. "I'd like to find out all about the roads, and then journey from town to town, seeing new places and new sights. I'd rather do that than go tearing around, making a couple of hundred miles a day."

"Your idea is the right one, my boy. And now, since I have found out that all of you are so interested, I have a proposition to make," continued Munroe Corsen. "I like you lads very much, and I have not forgotten how much you have done for me and mine. As you know, I and my family are going to Europe this summer, and Larpone is going,

too—to visit some of his relatives in France. Now, during our absence, what would you say if I gave you the use of this touring-car?" And the rich gentleman smiled broadly at his listeners.

"Oh. Mr. Corsen, do you really mean it?" gasped Harry.

"I do, Harry."

"It would be very kind, Mr. Corsen," said Joe. "But—but—oh, are you sure you mean it?" he faltered, thinking he might be dreaming.

"Yes, Joe. I've been thinking it over ever since you spoke about running a car the other day at the races. I overheard what you lads said at the refreshment booth."

"It would be the swellest thing that ever happened!" burst out Fred. "Why, we could positively have the time of our lives, Mr. Corsen! We could plan a regular tour, just as Joe said, and take out the other fellows, too. But wouldn't you be afraid we'd damage the car?" And Fred's face fell suddenly.

"I should wish you to take the best care you could of the machine. Of course, accidents are bound to happen,—punctures and blow-outs, and things like that,—and you would have to make the best of them. But I don't think anything serious will happen if you take care."

"We'll take care, don't worry about that, Mr. Corsen," said Joe, hastily. "But oh! it seems too good to be true! I was wishing you might let us use the car, but I didn't feel like asking it of you—you have already done so much for us."

"Well, you lads have done a great deal for me and my family," returned the rich gentleman, feelingly. "If I can give you a summer of pleasure, I feel it is my duty to do so. I will let you use the car until I come back from Europe, and Larpone shall teach all of you how to run it and how to make ordinary repairs. How about that?" he went on, turning to the chauffeur.

"To be sure, of a certainty," answered the Frenchman. He was an obliging fellow, naturally, and the fact that his wages were to be paid during the summer vacation made him more anxious to please than ever.

"Then we will consider it settled," announced Munroe Corsen. "And all of you can start in to take running lessons as soon as you please. At present we'll keep the car at my place, but after I am gone you will have to keep it elsewhere."

"We can keep it in our barn," said Joe. "There is plenty of room, and it is as dry as a bone."

"Very well. But I advise you to keep it under lock and key, so that nobody runs away with it."

"We'll do that, too," answered Harry.

"We have two extra shoes and several extra inner tubes," went on Mr. Corsen. "We also have a barrel of gasoline and a large can of lubricating oil."

"Oh, I guess we can buy our own gasoline and oil," murmured Fred.

"No, I wish you to use what I have first. Now, I am going to leave the car primarily in charge of Joe, but it is understood that you may all take turns at running it, if you wish, and it is also understood that you will give the other members of your base-ball club, your football club, and your boat club, rides if they desire them."

"We'll do that!" cried Joe, quickly, and his brother and Fred nodded in approval.

"About a tour. If you wish to take one later on, you may do so, picking out one or more of the other lads to go with you."

"How far can we go?" asked Fred.

"That I will leave to you. But I shouldn't go too far from home. And remember, if you go into another State, you may require another license for the car. And you'll have to get licenses to run the machine, too."

"Oh, we'll attend to all that!" cried Joe. "Say, am I really awake or dreaming?" he added.

"You are awake!" answered Munroe Corsen, with a laugh. "All I hope is that you don't hurt yourselves running the car."

"We'll be very careful," answered Harry, and the others promised the same.

"Of course, my offer is dependent on one thing," went on the rich gentleman, and the boys held their breath in suspense. "You will have to obtain your parents' permission to be out in the car and to run it yourselves."

"I see," said Harry, and looked somewhat dubious. Perhaps his father might not give the desired permission. Joe and Fred also looked grave. Here was a possible difficulty the boys had not thought of before.

It was about ten o'clock when the touring-car reached Lakeport and rolled up in front of the Rush homestead.

"We'll get out, too," said Joe to his brother. He wanted to talk to their chum before separating for the night.

"Don't you wish me to take you home?" questioned Mr. Corsen.

"No, thank you, it is only a step," said Joe. And then all the boys thanked the gentleman again for his kindness, and he went off, the boys watching the big car roll almost silently from view.

"It's too good to be true!" cried Harry, and commenced to dance a jig on the sidewalk. "Oh, what good times we will have this summer!"

"Please remember that we've got to get permission from father and mother first," broke in his brother. "I am afraid mother will object—she is so afraid of autos."

"My mother is afraid of 'em, too," added Fred. "But father rather likes 'em. He said he'd buy one if he could afford it."

"We ought to give them all a ride!" cried Harry. "Then they would know that automobiling is perfectly safe."

"That's an idea," returned Fred. "Are you going to speak about it to-night?"

"That depends," answered Joe, diplomatically. "I'll see how the land lies when we get home. Harry, you'd better leave it to me."

"I will," said the younger brother. "But don't you make a mess of it," he added, anxiously. "It would break my heart to have to give up that tour now."

"Well, I am just as anxious about it as you!" retorted Joe.

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST LESSON

The Westmore boys found their mother sitting up waiting for them. Their father and the other members of the family had retired.

"Well, did you have a nice ride?" questioned Mrs. Westmore, as she let them in.

"Oh, mother, we had the best ride ever!" cried Harry. "You can't imagine how far we went!"

"To Brookside and Bralham, I suppose."

"We went all the way to Washingtonville."

"Why, that is over fifty miles!" exclaimed Mrs. Westmore. "How could you go so far in such a short space of time!"

"Well, we did it, and we had a fine dinner at the Washingtonville Hotel in the bargain," said Joe. "The auto ran like clockwork all the way there and back."

"I am thankful for it, boys. I was so afraid you might have an accident, especially after it got dark," and the mother gave a sigh of relief.

"Pooh! the lamps made the roads as light as day," said Harry.

"I suppose so. But one hears of so many automobile accidents these days," answered Mrs. Westmore.

Joe and Harry looked at each other. Clearly now was no time to broach the subject so near to their hearts.

"We'll ask father first, to-morrow," whispered Joe, as he followed Harry into the entryway, to hang up his cap. And Harry nodded in approval. Then both lads kissed their mother good-night and went to bed.

It must be confessed that Joe did not sleep very well that night. He could not get the thoughts of Mr. Corsen's magnificent offer out of his head, and when he did fall into slumber, it was to dream that he was out on the road, steering the big touring-car. He dreamed that he was in a race against Si Voup and Al Milton, and that he was running dangerously close to a precipice. As the touring-car left the roadway and flew into space, he let out a wild yell for aid, and then came to himself and found Harry shaking him vigorously.

"Joe! Joe! Wake up! You are dreaming!"

"Wha—what's the matter? Was the auto smashed?" gasped the older youth, and then he

looked sheepishly at his brother. "My, what a dream I had!" he added.

"I should say you had a regular nightmare!" returned Harry. "You sat up and twisted the bedclothes right and left, and yelled like a wild Indian!"

"I thought I was running the auto, and Si Voup and Al Milton were getting the better of me."

"Boys! What is the matter?" called Mr. Westmore, and they heard their father walking through the hallway.

"Oh, it's nothing," stammered Harry. He caught his brother by the arm. "Don't say it was the auto, or maybe they won't want us to run it!"

"But I heard you cry out," insisted Mr. Westmore.

"I got a nightmare, that's all," answered Joe. "I'm all right now."

"It must have been the automobile ride that did it," came in Mrs. Westmore's voice. "They are so exciting, you know."

"More than likely it is something the boy ate," answered her husband. "He is not used to course dinners in the evening," and he returned to bed.

"Anyway, I'd rather have it laid to the dinner than to the auto," whispered Joe to Harry, and then he and his brother went to sleep again.

Both boys were up bright and early, and did a number of chores before breakfast. Harry kept looking at Joe, but it was not until breakfast was almost over that the older lad broached the subject that was so near to their hearts.

"The Corsens are going to Europe this summer—in fact, they are going to start week after next," said Joe, at last.

"So I heard," answered Mr. Westmore, as he stirred his coffee. "Well, they have more money to burn than I have."

"Are they going to lock up the mansion?" asked Laura, the boys' younger sister.

"Not exactly," said Harry. "They are going to leave a caretaker in charge—Mrs. Nally."

"The rest of the servants are going away, and the chauffeur is going, too," added Joe.

"Is Mr. Munroe going to take his automobile with him?" questioned Mr. Westmore, as he disposed of the last of his eggs.

"No." Joe took a deep breath. "He—er—he said he would let us have the touring-car while he was away. He said he wanted to do something for us boys for all we had done for him, and so he said we could use the car this summer, providing, of course, we'd take good care of it—and, of course, we'll do that," added Joe, hastily.

"We are not to have the car alone," added Harry. "Fred is to use it, too—and we are to let the other members of the clubs have rides." He was gazing very anxiously at his parents.

"Let you use the car!" cried Mrs. Westmore.

"How perfectly lovely!" exclaimed Laura. "Won't you let me have a ride?"

"To be sure!" answered Joe, giving her a grateful look. "We'll take you out, and all your girl friends, too."

"And who is going to run the machine?" questioned Mr. Westmore.

"We are all going to learn—Mr. Corsen's chauffeur is to teach us."

"You run that big car!" cried Mrs. Westmore, aghast. "Oh, Joe, you'll kill yourself, sure!"

"Mother, I'll do nothing of the kind! Why, lots of young fellows run cars."

"It would worry me to death! Oh, I cannot allow this, really, Joe, I can't!" And the mother's face showed her great anxiety.

"Si Voup runs a car," put in Laura. "I'm sure if he can do it, Joe can! Joe is a better baseball and football player than Si."

"Running an automobile isn't playing baseball or football," retorted the mother. "Every day one

reads in the newspaper of some accident to a machine! It's dreadful!"

"But you hear of football accidents, too," put in Harry. "Oh, I am sure, mother, we can learn to run that car in perfect safety."

"The way I understand it, running an automobile is expensive," said Mr. Westmore. "You have to buy gasoline and lubricating oil, and oil and other stuff for lights, and every time a tire burst, it costs a small fortune for repairs,—not to mention other breakdowns. You'd find it would eat up all your spending money and more."

"We'll take care of the expense, even if we have to earn the money," answered Joe. "Of course, Fred will pay his share, and the other boys will have to whack up, too, if they go along."

"I don't see how I can permit it," said Mrs. Westmore, with a sigh.

"Did Mr. Corsen seem to think you could run the machine?" asked Mr. Westmore.

"Why, yes. He said he would have his chauffeur teach us. It is very easy, dad."

"We'll take you and mother out some day and show you how easy it is!" added Harry.

"I don't think you'll get me in an automobile!" cried Mrs. Westmore.

"Oh, yes, ma, it will be fun!" cried Laura.

"Why, the boys can take us visiting to Brookside, and Camdale, and all around. It will be more fun than driving old Kate, she is getting so slow!"

Thus the talk continued, until it was time for Mr. Westmore to go to his store. He was willing to let the boys try running the automobile, but his wife still demurred.

"I'll talk to Mrs. Rush about it, and see what she says," said Mrs. Westmore at last, and there the matter had to rest.

In the meantime Fred had been having an equally hard time of it at home, trying to get his parents to consent. Mrs. Rush was willing to please her son, but the hardware merchant shook his head doubtfully.

"Fred is so heedless at times," he said. "He'd be sure to run the machine into a ditch, or maybe the lake."

"No, I wouldn't, father," answered the stout youth. "I'd run that machine as carefully as I'd drive a horse."

"Well, you're a careless driver, sometimes."

"But I'd be very, very careful!" pleaded Fred.

"Well, we'll see about it," answered Mr. Rush, non-committally.

But luck favored the boys. That afternoon Mrs. Westmore went to see Mrs. Rush, and the latter

persuaded the former that it would be no more dangerous for the boys to run the touring-car than for them to be scorching over the country roads on their bicycles, or going out on the lake in the Shale sloop.

"If the sloop went down in a squall they might be drowned," said Mrs. Rush. "And if they are on land that can't happen to them. And they are just as liable to break their necks on their bicycles as in a touring-car."

In the meantime Munroe Corsen, thinking, perhaps, that the boys would have difficulty in getting permission to take up his offer, went to see both Mr. Westmore and Mr. Rush, whom he knew well. He talked the matter over with both men for an hour, and at last the fathers said the boys might do as they pleased. But each added that he would not be responsible if the touring-car was wrecked.

"Very well," said Munroe Corsen. "I'll trust the lads to take good care of my property."

When the boys at last knew that they could really use the touring-car that summer, they went fairly wild with joy.

"Somebody will have to hold me down!" cried Harry. "I feel as if my head was a balloon!"

"Let us go and tell the other fellows!" cried Fred.

"I am afraid some of them will be a bit jealous," answered Joe. "But that can't be helped."

"We'll promise all of them plenty of rides," answered the stout youth.

The news soon spread, and the Westmore boys and Fred were congratulated by Link, Paul, and a number of others on their good fortune. One or two of the old football eleven were a little jealous, but they took good care not to show it.

"We are going to give all of you long rides," said Joe. "But first we have got to learn how to run the car."

"Excuse me, but I don't want to be in it while you are learning," answered Matt. "Call on me after you have your diplomas!" and this sally brought forth a general laugh.

Joe was the first to take a lesson in running the car. He went out with the chauffeur directly after school, and remained on the road for two hours. During that time he was initiated into the mysteries of the foot clutch and the foot brake, and the use of the speed lever and the hand brake, and was also made to understand the spark and the throttle controls.

"As you know," said the chauffeur. "There are three speeds forward and one reverse. "When you start your car you do it on first or low speed. After

it is running well, you can change to second, and then to third, or high."

"It is not very difficult," said the youth.

"The main thing about running a big car is to know what to do on the moment," was the teacher's answer. "An emergency arises—you act quickly, —or you are lost."

"In other words, keep your wits about you," and Joe laughed.

"Yes, exactly so, my young friend."

When the lesson was over, the boy was somewhat surprised to learn that he was in a dripping perspiration and as limp as a rag. His nerves had been at top tension, and now came the reaction. But he had done well, and the chauffeur praised him accordingly.

"Two more lessons, and you will be able to run alone," said the Frenchman. "Of course, you must go slow. The rest, he will be experience!"

"Never mind, I'll get there!" said Joe, quietly but firmly. "I've made up my mind to it!"

On the way back to the town they passed Si Voup. At once the bully turned his car around and came up alongside.

"What are you doing? Learning to run a car?" he asked, rudely, of Joe.

"I am," was the short reply.

"Going to be a chauffeur, eh?" went on Si. "Well, it's a pretty decent-paying job. But I don't think anybody around here will want to hire you." And off he sped down a side street.

"Wonder what he'll say when he learns we are going to have the use of this car all summer?" mused Joe. "I guess he will be somewhat jealous."

CHAPTER XII

A LITTLE HOLD-UP

As was to be expected, the boys were all anxious to learn how to run the touring-car, and the Corsen chauffeur had his hands full teaching them. But he was a patient man and did not in the least resent the numerous questions put to him. He showed Harry and Fred how to work the levers and pedals, and the wheel, and then gave all the boys several lessons in taking off and putting on tires, in fixing battery wires and spark plugs, and in making numerous other small repairs.

At the end of a week Joe felt quite at home in the car, and under the supervision of the French chauffeur he took out Link, Paul, and Bart. They went out for two hours and covered about twenty-five miles of good roads around the lake, and the older Westmore boy felt proud of his achievement.

"In a couple of weeks I'll be ready to take the car anywhere," declared the youth. "Why, it seems to come as natural as playing baseball."

"Well, I've heard that some folks were natural-

born automobilists," answered Link. "You must be one of 'em."

Joe and Harry were anxious to get their father and mother and sister Laura in the car, and succeeded on the following Saturday afternoon. Joe was at the wheel, and though he was somewhat nervous, he did his best not to show it.

"Now, please don't have any accidents or breakdowns!" whispered Harry. "If you do, mother will be worried to death every time we go out."

"I'll do my best," answered the older brother.

They took the road for Camdale, and all went well until they were within about a mile of that place, when Joe espied ahead of them a farmer driving a big wagon full of empty milk cans. The turnout ahead occupied the center of the road.

Joe tooted his horn, and then, as the farmer paid no attention, he tooted again. Still the farmer kept to the middle of the road.

"Joe, you can't pass him!" cried Mrs. Westmore, as he sent the machine a little to the left.

"I wish he'd turn out and let me pass," was the son's answer, and he tooted the horn once more.

"That man must be deaf," was Laura's comment.

"No, he isn't deaf," answered Harry. "It's old Jed Tardus, and it is only his meanness. He never

turns out for us when we are on our bicycles. He makes us get off or ride around the best we can."

"He certainly ought to give us half the road," was Mr. Westmore's comment. He knew nothing about automobiles, but he was used to driving and knew the old farmer had no right to allow such a slow-going vehicle as he was driving to block the highway.

Again Joe tooted, as loudly as possible. The old farmer turned his head slightly and grinned, but did not turn his team from the straight course they were pursuing. The horses were kicking up the dust, and to remain in it was anything but pleasant.

"This is an outrage!" said Mr. Westmore. And then he called to the farmer, but the latter paid no attention to what was said.

Presently the automobile reached a good side road, and rather than continue to follow the farm wagon, Joe turned into this. This took them nearly a mile out of their way, but, as they were riding for pleasure, this did not matter. They passed through Camdale and then went to a village called Oak View, where Mrs. Westmore and Laura made a short call on some former neighbors.

"Why, so you have an auto!" cried one of the ladies. "How nice!"

"It is not ours, but my sons are to have the use

of it this summer," answered Mrs. Westmore, and there was just a trace of pride in her tones. It was certainly very stylish to be able to make calls in a touring-car.

"Well, I wish I had an auto," said the lady. "You can get around the country so much faster, and go so far, too. When I drive our horse I am always afraid of tiring him out."

"You can't tire the auto," answered Laura, with a laugh.

The call at an end, Joe headed the touring-car for another town three miles away. Here was a straight, level stretch of road, and he increased his machine's speed to twenty and then twenty-five miles an hour. This is not fast riding to those who are used to it, but to Mr. and Mrs. Westmore and Laura it felt as if they were on an express train.

"Mercy on us, Joe! How you are going!" cried Mrs. Westmore, as she clutched at the side of the car.

"Is it safe to run so fast?" queried his father, anxiously.

"Perfectly safe, if you watch out," was the son's reply.

"The Corsen chauffeur runs much faster at times," said Harry.

"Oh, this is glorious!" cried Laura, as she bared

her throat to the breeze. "I feel just as if I was flying!" And her sparkling eyes showed her delight.

Mr. Westmore had always liked a fast horse, and, his first fear over, he rather enjoyed the little spurt. Mrs. Westmore, however, shook her head.

"I like the easy riding best," she declared. "You can see the scenery better;" and then Joe slowed down so that she might not be worried further.

By the time they were on their way home, Joe had demonstrated that he could run the car very well. Then Harry pleaded to be allowed to show his ability, and drove the car for several miles. He had to pilot the machine through a herd of cows, and this made him a little nervous, but he got through in safety, and for this his folks and Laura praised him.

They had passed to a side road leading into Lakeport. On this was located the farm belonging to old Jed Tardus. The road was somewhat narrow, and Joe, who was again at the wheel, was glad that no vehicle was in sight ahead, for a passage would have been difficult, if not impossible, the ground on either side of the road being marshy.

"Here comes old Tardus now!" cried Harry, who was looking behind along the road into which they had turned.

"Are you sure, Harry?" asked Joe, quickly.

"Yes."

"Has he got his big wagon with him?"

"Certainly, and he seems to be in a hurry, too," added the younger Westmore lad.

"I think I'll give him a dose of his own medicine," said Joe, dryly.

He watched the road and saw, at a distance ahead, a spot that was particularly narrow. On either side the ground was soft and filled with pools of water. He threw in his second speed and slowed down his engine, until the big touring-car did little more than crawl along.

Behind them rattled the big farm wagon, the empty milk cans jangling together. Old Jed Tardus was late for the afternoon's milking and he was lashing his team to get home.

"Hi, there! Git out of the way!" he yelled, as he came up behind the touring-car.

"Don't pay any attention!" whispered Joe, without looking around.

Mr. Westmore smiled grimly as he understood his son's move, and even Mrs. Westmore became interested. As for Laura and Harry, they could scarcely keep from laughing outright.

"I say there, let me git past!" bawled Jed Tardus. "Move yer old smoke-wagon to one side!"

To this call those in the touring-car paid not the slightest attention. Joe was nearing the narrowest part of the road and he throttled down the machine still more, so that it all but stopped.

"Say, you, be you deaf?" roared the old farmer, shaking his whip savagely. "Git to one side of the road, or else put on some speed! I ain't a-goin' to stay here all night waitin' fer yer!"

"He's a patient man," whispered Harry to his sister. "A kind, gentle man!" And at this Laura had to stuff her handkerchief in her mouth to keep from shrieking with laughter. Mr. Westmore was enjoying the joke as much as were his sons. He knew old Jed Tardus to be a mean fellow whom nearly everybody in that neighborhood despised.

"If yer don't let me pass I'll have the law on yer!" shrieked the old farmer, rising from the seat of his wagon, and brandishing his whip more savagely than before. "Yer can't block the road this way! Turn out an' let me go by!"

The touring-car continued to crawl along, and behind it came the farm wagon, the horses scarcely putting one foot before the other. Then, at the very narrowest part of the road, Joe came to a stop and jumped to the ground.

"Say, what are yer goin' to do now?" bawled Jed Tardus, in alarm. "Have yer got a break-

down? If yer have, yer can't block the road this way nohow! Shove yer machine to one side."

"I'm not going to get stuck in the mud," answered Joe, calmly, but with a wink at his father and the others.

"Well, yer can't block the road. I'm in a hurry to git home, to do th' milkin'."

"Mr. Tardus, this pays you back for what you did to us, when we were trying to pass you on the Camdale Turnpike," answered Joe. He was bending over a wheel, pretending to examine it.

"Huh!" snorted the farmer. "You clear the road an' let me pass."

"Why didn't you let us pass?" And now Joe bent over another wheel.

"I ain't got no use for these here smoke-wagons, thet's why. Now you let me pass, do yer hear? I'm in a tremendous hurry, I am."

"I am not stopping you from passing. Drive around all you want to;" and Joe bent down to look at the rear axle.

"I can't drive around, 'less I git stuck in the mud. Is it a breakdown?" asked the farmer, anxiously.

"If it is, it won't take more than an hour to mend," said Joe, tantalizingly.

"An hour!" shrilled the old man. "Do yer think I'm going to be held up here an hour by you?

"I AM NOT STOPPING YOU FROM PASSING. DRIVE AROUND ALL YOU WANT TO."—*Page 124.*

down? If yer have, yer can't block the road this way nohow! Shove yer machine to one side."

"I'm not going to get stuck in the mud," answered Joe, calmly, but with a wink at his father and the others.

"Well, yer can't block the road. I'm in a hurry to git home, to do th' milkin'."

"Mr. Tardus, this pays you back for what you did to us, when we were trying to pass you on the Camdale Turnpike," answered Joe. He was bending over a wheel, pretending to examine it.

"Huh!" snorted the farmer. "You clear the road an' let me pass."

"Why didn't you let us pass?" And now Joe bent over another wheel.

"I ain't got no use for these here smoke-wagons, thet's why. Now you let me pass, do yer hear? I'm in a tremendous hurry, I am."

"I am not stopping you from passing. Drive around all you want to;" and Joe bent down to look at the rear axle.

"I can't drive around, 'less I git stuck in the mud. Is it a breakdown?" asked the farmer, anxiously.

"If it is, it won't take more than an hour to mend," said Joe, tantalizingly.

"An hour!" shrilled the old man. "Do yer think I'm going to be held up here an hour by you?

"I AM NOT STOPPING YOU FROM PASSING. DRIVE AROUND ALL YOU WANT TO."—*Page 124.*

Not much I ain't!" And he sprang to the ground and came towards Joe.

"You can suit yourself," answered the boy. "Pull around me if you want to. I have no objections."

"Didn't I tell yer I can't pull around in this mud? It's an outrage to block the road, especially when I've got to git home."

Joe got down to peer under the automobile. He could hardly keep a straight face.

"Well?" queried Jed Tardus. "Will it take an hour to mend?"

"Not more than that," answered the boy.

"I ain't going to wait then," cried the old man, and leaped back on his wagon. Not without great difficulty he turned his team around and headed for a side road that led to his farm by a back way. As he did this Joe leaped into the touring-car, started up his engine on the compression in the cylinders, and was off at a speed of fifteen miles an hour.

"Hi, what's that?" roared Jed Tardus, and then, realizing how he had been hoaxed, he shook his fist at those in the retreating automobile.

"He won't forget that lesson in a hurry," was Joe's comment.

"It was just all right, Joe," added Harry.

"It certainly did serve him right, for making us take his dust on the Turnpike," said Laura.

"He will be very angry at you after this," said Mrs. Westmore. "You must be careful and not get into any more trouble with him."

"Tardus is one of the kind who think they own the road," was Mr. Westmore's comment. "They do not respect the rights of others. He deserved the lesson Joe gave him."

When Lakeport was reached, Joe left his mother and sister at the house and then took his father around to the flour-and-feed establishment. All were well satisfied with the ride, and with the way the two boys had handled the automobile.

"A little more practice and you'll be able to run the car as well as anybody," said Mr. Westmore, and not without pride. "But take my advice and don't try to do any speeding. That is how the worst of the accidents happen."

Arrangements had already been made to keep the car in the Westmore barn. The two lads were taking it to that place when they chanced to run across Walter Bannister and Frank Pemberton, two of the members of the old baseball club and football eleven.

"Give us a little ride, will you?" cried Walter.

"Sure thing," answered Joe. "Jump in!" And

the two boys entered the tonneau without further ceremony. Joe started up the machine and headed down the main street. As he passed a side street another automobile swung into view. It was the Voup car, and in it were Si Voup and Ike Boardman.

CHAPTER XIII

PLOTTING TO RUIN A CAR

"THERE is Si Voup!" said Frank. "Wonder what he thinks of your having this machine?"

"He thinks I am learning to be a chauffeur," answered Joe. "He was kind enough, too, to tell me he didn't think anybody around here would hire me."

"Of all the cads!" burst out Walter. "Say, that fellow makes me sick clear down to my toes!"

"So he does me," answered Harry.

For a minute the Voup automobile kept behind the Corsen machine. But then Si turned on a little more power and ranged alongside.

"I see you are sporting around in that auto a good deal," he said, sarcastically. "I should think Mr. Corsen would be afraid to trust it with you."

"Why should he be afraid?" demanded Harry.

"You fellows don't know how to run a car."

"We are learning fast enough," answered Joe.

"If you damage the car, Mr. Corsen will make you foot the bill," came from Ike Boardman.

"Maybe you don't know it costs a fortune to repair big autos like that."

"Well, you won't have to pay the bill, Ike, so you needn't worry," answered Joe.

"Humph! I suppose you think you are some pumpkins, riding in that machine," remarked Si Voup. "Just the same, I'll bet you don't dare to race with me."

"I don't care to race with anybody," answered Joe.

"Afraid, eh?" sneered the bully.

"They don't know enough about the machine yet to race," broke in Frank. "Just wait till they have the hang of it, Si, they'll beat you out of your boots."

"Bah! You needn't brag, Frank Pemberton. He'll never beat me!"

"Where do you want to race—up Raddy's Hill?" questioned Harry, mischievously. "That's a good test for any machine, Si."

"Rats! Don't you talk to me! I would have gone up the hill right enough if there hadn't been something the matter with my magneto."

"That's right, blame it on the poor old car," murmured Walter.

"Did you hire that car from Mr. Corsen?" asked Ike, curiously.

"We did not," answered Joe.

"Then, how is it you've got it? You didn't buy it, did you?"

"No."

"Did he lend it to you?"

"Yes."

"How long?" And now Si was as much interested as Ike.

"We are to have the car all summer—until the Corsens come back from Europe."

"Humph!" muttered Si. "He's a fool to let you have the car that long!"

"Don't you call Mr. Corsen a fool!" cried Harry, his eyes flashing. "If you do, you may get into trouble. He is a very fine gentleman—one of the best in this neighborhood."

"Oh, of course you'd say that—as he has let you have the auto," muttered Ike.

"He'll be sorry he did it, when he come back and sees how you have misused the machine," added Si, and, with this parting shot, the bully put on speed and sped out of sight up the road.

"He's as jealous as he can be," was Walter's comment.

"He'd like to be the only young fellow in Lakeport with an auto," added Frank.

On the following day the Westmore boys went

to the Corsen garage and brought down to their father's stable a box of tools and also the can of lubricating oil and the barrel of gasoline.

"I don't want the gasoline in the stable," said Mr. Westmore, the next day. "You'll have to store it out in the back lot." And this was done, the boys putting the barrel under a temporary shed.

Two days later the Corsens and their chauffeur left. The boys went to the mansion to bid them good-by.

"I hope you have a nice time," said Joe.

"Thank you," returned Munroe Corsen. "And I trust all of you lads have a fine time with the automobile."

"We will have," answered Fred.

"I'll send you some picture post cards when I get to Europe," said Violet to Harry. "And you must write and let me know what trips you take;" and so it was arranged. Ever since Harry had saved the little miss from the angry bull the pair had thought a good deal of each other.

After the Corsens had departed Joe, Harry, and Fred took a long ride by themselves, each lad taking his turn at driving the car.

"I feel almost as if we owned the car now," said Fred. "With Mr. Corsen away we can do as we please with it."

"Just the way I feel, too," answered Harry. "But we have got to be careful, Fred. The car is worth a pile of money."

"Yes, indeed, we'll be careful," replied Fred. "I'd not have anything happen to the car for the world."

"I'll tell you what I think we might do," said Harry. "Take out the other fellows at various times up to about the middle of July, and then plan a regular tour, to last two or three weeks."

"That's all right, Harry. But how much will such a tour cost? We'll use up gasoline, and we'll have to stop at hotels at night."

"Gasoline is cheap, and you can run the car for about a cent or a cent and a quarter a mile," said Joe, who had made a study of that problem. "As for hotels, we can either stop at such as are cheap, or maybe we could arrange to stop at the homes of relatives or friends."

"Say, that's a scheme!" cried Fred. "I have a pile of relatives scattered around this State. They'd be glad to have me call on them."

"But not with a touring crowd," added Harry.

"That's so, too, I suppose."

"I know what we could do anyway," said Joe. "If we came to a town and some of the boys had relatives there, those boys could stay with their

relatives and the others could go to the hotel. That would help to keep down expenses."

"And if we got strapped, we could sleep in the auto, gypsy style!" cried Harry.

"Fine—especially in a thunderstorm!" answered Joe, dryly, and then all laughed.

"Another question is, whom to take along, if we go on a tour. We can't take the whole crowd. Somebody is bound to be disappointed."

"We'll have to arrange that later," said the elder Westmore boy.

Having the touring-car at their command, the boys found themselves wonderfully popular, especially with the younger element of Lakeport. They took out all their boy friends, and twice Laura made up parties of girls. On Friday of the week before the Fourth of July school closed, and on the next afternoon the boys and girls held a picnic in the woods between Lakeport and Brookside. Joe and Fred took turns in running the touring car, and brought down two loads from their own town and one load from Brookside. The girls furnished sandwiches and cakes and the boys procured ice-cream and soda water, and soon the picnic was in full swing. Lunch was had under some wide-spreading trees, and everybody was in the best of humor.

Of course, Si Voup and Ike Boardman had been left out of the picnic. They, however, heard all about it from one of the lads who had been invited, and both were much exercised to think that they could not share in the festivities.

"It's all those Westmores' doings," muttered the bully. "They just like to see you and me get left, Ike."

"Well, Fred Rush is to blame, too," answered his crony. "I understand he has as much to say about the car as Joe and Harry."

"Yes, but Joe Westmore is the leader, and the others always do as he says. I wish I could spoil the thing!"

"Maybe we can," said Ike. "But I don't want to get caught doing it."

Si and Ike watched the departure of one load after another from Lakeport. They found out where the picnic was to be held, and later in the day took an automobile ride in that direction.

"They are in the woods yonder!" cried Ike, as he heard a burst of musical laughter from among the trees. "Seem to be enjoying themselves, too."

"Wonder what they did with the Corsen car?" murmured Si, looking around.

"It must be somewhere near here."

"Let us look for it."

"What for, Si?"

"Maybe we can fix it so they can't run it back."

"Say, that's a scheme! But we don't want to get caught at it," added the bully's crony, nervously.

"We'll keep our eyes open," was Si's cool answer.

The two boys left the Voup car in the middle of the road and walked along on the outskirts of the woods. Soon they saw some broad tracks and discovered the six-cylinder car resting on the ground under a big tree. The machine was deserted.

"They didn't dare to run it off the road very far," remarked Si, as he came to a halt beside the car. "My, but she's a heavy machine!" he added.

"What do you intend to do?" asked Ike, glancing around, to see if anybody was in sight.

"I'd like to smash the engine for 'em!" cried the bully, wrathfully. The merry peals of laughter coming from the girls seemed to render him furious. There was one girl he had hoped to take out riding that afternoon, but she had declined and had gone to the picnic instead.

"Say, I wouldn't do that!" cried Ike, getting scared. "Those engines cost a barrel of money!"

"What do I care? Didn't I have to pay for that busted lamp the time they made me run into the bushes?"

"I—I don't think I'd touch the engine, Si. Just pull out the spark plugs, or something like that."

"Say, who is running this, you or me, Ike Boardman?"

"You are—and if you break the engine, don't blame me—if you get caught."

"I'll not get caught, I tell you."

"Somebody may be looking."

"Do you see anybody?" And now Si drew back hastily.

"No, but somebody may be. Pull out the spark plugs, and puncture a tire or two, and let it go at that," went on Ike, who was alarmed over the thought that his companion might totally ruin the expensive automobile.

"I'll fix it so they won't run the machine all summer!" growled the bully. "I've been wishing for a long time to get square with those fellows, and now I'm going to do it!"

"But, Si, this machine is worth three or four thousand dollars!"

"I don't care if it is worth ten thousand dollars, Ike. Those Westmore boys and Fred Rush aren't going to crow over me!"

"Be careful. If they see you——"

"You keep on the watch, while I do the trick," muttered the bully. He walked around the big

touring-car, surveying it critically. "Ah, I have it!"

"What are you going to do?"

"I'll show you in a minute, Ike. Get ready to run when I tell you to."

Si stepped to the side of the car, where a tool-box was screwed fast. To his satisfaction he found the tool-box unlocked. He fumbled around in it, and presently brought forth a hammer and a chisel.

"Now I'll show 'em what I can do!" he muttered. "Inside of two minutes I'll fix this car so that it will have to remain in the machine shop for a month!"

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE PICNIC

Joe and his chums were having a fine time in the woods. The lunch had passed off pleasantly and the girls and boys were now playing various games. The place resounded with laughter, and nobody anticipated troubles of any kind.

Among the boys taken out in the automobile was Charley Crown, a cripple known to the readers of other volumes in this series. Charley could not walk very well, and it was a great treat to him to have a ride. He had been taken out twice already, and Joe had promised him a long ride before starting on the anticipated tour.

Charley could not romp around, and so after lunch he sat under a tree and watched the others. Then he wandered away to pick a bunch of wild flowers to take home to his mother.

As he was picking the flowers he heard the sounds of an automobile on the forest road and walked in the direction, to learn if Joe or some of the others were using the touring-car. To his sur-

prise he saw that Si Voup and Ike Boardman had arrived and that both boys were heading towards the Corsen car.

Charley knew that the bully and his crony were bitter enemies of the Westmore boys and Fred Rush, and he instantly suspected trouble. As he did not feel equal to confronting the intruders himself, he made off as fast as his infirmities permitted to where the picnic was in progress. He caught Harry's eye, and at once beckoned frantically to him.

"What do you want, Charley?" asked the younger Westmore boy, hurrying up.

"Your auto—Si Voup and Ike Boardman are by it—maybe they will do some harm!" gasped Charley. His exertions had taken almost all his strength.

"Si Voup and Ike Boardman—at our car!" cried Harry. "I must look into this!"

Link and Paul were near by, and he called to them to follow him. The three lads lost no time in dashing through the woods in the direction where the six-cylinder car had been left.

As they came in sight of the machine Harry's heart almost stood still in horror. Si Voup had unfastened the hood of the engine and thrown it back. Now he was bending over the engine, with a chisel in one hand and a hammer in the other. Ike Boardman was close by, watching him.

"Hi! hi! stop that!" yelled Harry, and waved his arm threateningly. "You let our auto alone, Si Voup!"

At the sound of Harry's voice Ike Boardman gave a jump of alarm and Si dropped his chisel on the engine.

"Why didn't you keep your eyes open and give warning?" muttered the bully to his crony.

"I—I did watch out!" faltered Ike. "Oh, what shall we do?" His face showed his terror.

"I say, what are you doing to our auto?" demanded Harry, as he came closer.

"Why—er—nothing much," stammered the bully.

"You have no right to touch our machine."

"I didn't hurt it."

"What were you doing with that hammer and chisel?"

"I'll wager he was going to do something to the machinery," was Link's comment.

"Maybe he has done something already," added Paul.

"I haven't done a thing," answered Si.

"He was just going to—er—to examine the engine, to learn how it—er—it worked," said Ike, struck by an idea.

"HI! HI! STOP THAT!" YELLED HARRY.—*Page 140.*

"You go tell that to the grasshoppers, Ike Boardman!" returned Harry. "You were up to some trick! I know you!"

"Come on, Si; let us get out of here!" whispered Ike.

"I'll go when I am ready," snapped the bully, who was, as already stated, in a particularly ugly mood that day. He restored the hammer and the chisel to the tool-box.

"Let that hood alone," continued Harry, as the bully started to close it. "I want to look at that machinery. If you damaged anything, you'll pay for it."

"We'd better go—the others may come at any minute," pleaded Ike.

He had hardly spoken when Joe appeared, coming on the run, and followed by Bart, Matt, George Dixon, and several others. Then a number of the girls also arrived, but they kept in the background, having been warned by Charley Crown that there might be a fight.

"It is that horrid Si Voup and that Boardman boy!" cried one girl. "I don't see why they couldn't stay away."

"They are jealous because they weren't invited to the picnic, I suppose," added another.

"What does this mean, Harry?" asked Joe, as

he came closer. "What are those fellows doing here?"

"That is what I am trying to find out." And Harry told about the hammer and the chisel. In the meantime Si concluded to take his crony's advice and leave, if it could be done. He had no desire to face a crowd.

"Stop them!" cried Harry, as Si and Ike moved back in the direction of the Voup car.

"Stand where you are!" ordered Paul, and got behind Si, while Link and Matt headed off Ike. Then Bart strode forward and caught the bully by the arm.

"Let me go!" cried Si, fiercely. "I haven't done anything! You have no right to detain me!"

"We'll see if you haven't done anything," answered Bart, coolly. He was such a big fellow, and so strong, that he had no fear of Si.

All the boys who had attended the picnic surrounded the bully and his crony, so that it was impossible for them to escape. Then Joe and Fred examined the machinery of the Corsen automobile.

"I guess he didn't have time to do anything," said Joe, at last. "You got here too quick for him, Harry."

"It was lucky I did," answered the brother.

"You'll pay for holding me up like this," growled

Si Voup. "I've got an errand to do, and I'm in a hurry."

"You are wasting your breath, talking like that," rejoined Matt. "You can be thankful if you get out of this with a whole skin."

"Wonder if we hadn't better duck 'em in the pond," said Fred, with a side wink at his chums.

"A ducking would do 'em good—cool off their blood," answered Paul.

"Don't you dare to do it!" screamed Ike. "I've got a new suit of clothes on! I don't want 'em ruined!"

"We'll let them go this time," said Joe, after consulting with his brother and Fred. "But don't you dare to touch this machine again, or come near it."

"Humph! you can't dictate to me!" grumbled Si. But his face showed his relief.

He hurried to where he had left his own machine, and cranked up in haste. Then he got in, and Ike Boardman followed. The power was turned on, and Si sped up the country road, and was soon lost to view in a cloud of dust.

"Don't suppose he'll come back, do you?" queried Harry.

"Oh, I rather think he is too scared," answered Fred.

"We can thank Charley for saving the machine," went on the younger Westmore boy. And all in the party praised the crippled lad for what he had done.

That year was to be an unusually patriotic one at Lakeport. On the morning of the Fourth of July there was to be a parade of soldiers and firemen, with a reading of the Declaration of Independence from a stand on the public common, and in the evening there was to be a display of fireworks.

"I was planning to go on a long ride on the Fourth," said Joe, to his brother and Fred. "But with so much going on, maybe we had better stay at home."

"Let us take a ride in the afternoon, after the parade," answered Fred. "We can come home in time for the fireworks." And so it was arranged.

The parade on the Fourth of July was a creditable one for a town the size of Lakeport. Visitors were present from Brookside, Bralham, and other points, and the soldiers and firemen made a brave showing. The stand on the common was decorated with flags and bunting, and a local band, recently organized, discoursed patriotic airs. Of course, the boys were out in force, and a good many of them kept themselves busy, shooting off firecrackers, pistols, and small cannons.

Matt Roscoe was in his element, for the Fourth gave him many opportunities for indulging in jokes. He commenced the day by discharging a giant cracker directly under the window of the Westmore boys, at five o'clock in the morning.

"Hi, what's this?" cried Harry, leaping up. "An earthquake?" And then he ran to the window and looked down. "Hello, Matt! Couldn't you sleep last night?"

"Huh! I've been up two hours!" retorted the fun-loving youth. "Come on down and get busy!"

All the boys were soon outside, and a goodly quantity of powder was set off before breakfast. Then Matt, in company with Fred, who had come over, hurried away to get something to eat.

As Matt was turning into his own street he caught sight of Si Voup and Ike Boardman. They were leaning over the fence that surrounded the cottage where Charley Crown lived.

"Hum! What are those fellows up to?" asked Matt of himself, and silently he sneaked up behind the bully and his crony.

He saw that the crippled boy was sitting in a hammock stretched from one post of the piazza to the other. His back was towards the fence, and

he was counting some firecrackers he held in his hands. From one of the pockets of his jacket a string of firecrackers was dangling.

Si Voup had a stick of lighted punk in his hand and was on the point of setting fire to the crackers in the cripple's pocket. It was a mean trick to contemplate, for there was no telling but that Charley might be seriously injured by the explosions.

Matt had an old horse-pistol with him, and it was well loaded. Not stopping to think twice—for there was need of haste—he stepped up directly behind Si, elevated the firearm, and pulled the trigger.

Bang! The report was tremendous, and Si Voup and Ike Boardman gave a jump into the air, and so did Charley Crown. Si dropped his punk, and bumped into Ike, and both went sprawling beside the fence.

"What are you trying to do, kill us?" cried the bully, when he had somewhat recovered from his alarm.

"That hit me in the ear!" whined Ike.

"Oh, Matt, how you scared me!" faltered Charley, while his mother came rushing from the house to learn if anybody had been hurt. Then he looked down and saw the others. "How did you get here?" he asked, in astonishment.

"I did it to save you from trouble, Charley," answered the fun-loving youth. "I saw Si leaning over the fence with his lighted punk. He was going to set fire to the crackers in your pocket."

"The idea!" cried Mrs. Crown, wrathfully. "Si Voup, you clear out of here and be quick about it! Don't you come near my poor crippled boy again!"

"I—er—I wasn't going to do nothing of the kind!" answered the bully. He glared at Matt. "You just wait—I'll fix you for this, see if I don't!"

"You fired that pistol so close to my ear I'm almost deaf," said Ike. "I'm going to tell my father on you!"

"Do it—and I'll tell him how you were going to injure that Corsen auto," retorted Matt. "Charley, you'd better look out that they don't hurt you."

"I will," promised the cripple.

"If they come around here again, I'll ask the constable to arrest them," said Mrs. Crown. "I heard about what Charley did at the picnic. I suppose they are angry because he stopped them from injuring that touring-car."

"That's just it," answered Matt.

Si and Ike had gone on their way. The bully was angry and showed it.

"I'll fix those chaps yet—see if I don't," he muttered. "I know what I'll do!" he added, suddenly.

"What?" asked his crony.

"Wait till this afternoon and I'll show you!"

CHAPTER XV

A FOURTH-OF-JULY ADVENTURE

The touring-car could hold seven on a pinch, and the Westmore boys and Fred decided to take along Matt, Paul, Link, and Bart for the ride that afternoon. They were to go to Barton Park, where the football team had played a number of games. At the Park a baseball game between a local nine and one from Bralham was to take place, and the lads thought they might be able to see a part of this contest, if not the whole of it. Even though some of them had taken to automobiling, the ball fever still burned strongly within their breasts, and they often played when they had an extra hour off.

In a roundabout way Si Voup had learned that the lads were bound for Barton Park, and he at once laid his plans to "square up" with them, as he expressed it. He got an early dinner, and soon he and Ike rode away in the Voup machine.

"They'll come by way of the Jack's Hill road, I've heard," said Si. "And we can lay for 'em near the brook bridge."

"But what are you going to do?" asked Ike, for so far his crony had not disclosed his plans.

"I'll tell you when the right time comes, Ike."

"I don't want to get caught again, like we did at the picnic."

"We won't get caught this time, don't fear. They'll never even suspect us, if we make a quick getaway."

"Well, I suppose you know what you are doing," grumbled Ike. "But be careful, that's all."

Si ran his car with all speed to the bridge at the foot of Jack's Hill, and then turned down a road that followed the brook and joined the highway leading to Bralham. Here, he said, they would get out. The automobile was left at the roadside, screened by some bushes.

"We'll go back on foot," he said. "Hurry up—we haven't any time to spare."

Still wondering what was in his crony's mind, Ike followed Si back to the vicinity of the bridge. This was a wooden structure, spanning a rocky water-course about ten feet wide and six or eight feet deep.

"Now then, to work!" cried the bully, and from a paper he carried he unwrapped two short pieces of iron, each with a sharpened end.

"But what are you going to do?" insisted Ike, as he rather unwillingly took one of the irons.

"We'll loosen up some of the planking of the bridge. Then, when their auto comes along, it will fall right down into the hole."

"Oh, Si, that's dangerous!" protested Ike.

"No, it ain't! It will give 'em a shaking up, and maybe break something on the car, but that's all."

"I don't like it."

"Oh, come on! What's the matter with you, anyway, Ike? You are getting more chicken-hearted every day."

"I don't want to kill anybody."

"Nobody will be killed, or even hurt. Come on."

Thus urged, Ike set to work, in company with Si, and soon the two had several of the planks of the bridge torn up.

"But suppose somebody else comes along?" asked Ike. "We don't want to get strangers into trouble."

"We'll watch out for that, Ike. Travel isn't very heavy on this road."

The planks were left on the bridge, but in such a manner that the slightest jar would displace them.

"I must say, I don't like this at all," protested

Ike. "If anybody is hurt, and they find it out, they'll send us to prison."

"They won't find us out. Nobody saw us, did they? Well then, we are safe. Come on back to the auto."

"Aren't you going to wait and see what happens?"

"We can see this bridge from the top of Simpson's hill. I'll run my car over there."

Still protesting, Ike allowed himself to be taken back to the automobile. Here Si placed the irons under the back seat, and then cranked up. Soon the machine was running along the brook road, and presently they left this and came out on the top of Simpson's hill.

"We can see the bridge from here," said Si, as he came to a halt. "I brought our field glasses with me."

Just then, from a distance, they heard the honk-honk of an automobile horn.

"That's the Corsen car!" cried the bully. "I know it by the horn!"

Ike turned pale and commenced to tremble.

"Oh, I wish I hadn't done it!" he faltered. "If anybody is killed——"

"You shut up!" answered Si, fiercely. "Remember, no matter what happens, we know abso-

lutely nothing about this. We came by this road and weren't within a quarter of a mile of that bridge."

"Yes, yes, but—but——"

"Oh, shut up! I want to see what happens."

Ike subsided, and strained his eyes in the direction of the distant bridge. Si had the field glasses to his eyes and was all attention.

In the meantime the big green automobile was rushing along the road towards the bridge. Joe was at the wheel, with Fred beside him, and the other lads were in the tonneau of the car. All were talking and laughing, and Harry was waving a flag he carried. Matt had told the others of what had happened at Charley Crown's home.

"It's a mean piece of business—playing tricks on a cripple," was Paul's comment.

"That's what it is," added Link. "I am glad you scared the wits out of 'em."

"Wonder if they'll be at the ball game," said Bat. "I saw them going off in the Voup car."

"Si doesn't care much for baseball—since his club busted up," said Harry.

"I guess he doesn't care for anything but to make trouble for other folks," was Fred's comment. "I can't understand such a fellow at all. If he was

the right sort, what a fine time he could have, with all his money."

The big touring-car gained the top of Jack's Hill with ease, and then started down towards the bridge. Although Joe now felt quite at home in the driver's seat, he took no unusual chances, but applied the foot-brake and came down the hill slowly.

"Let her out a little!" cried Paul. "We want to get to that baseball game."

"I will let her out—after we cross the bridge," answered Joe. Nevertheless, he increased the speed a little, for the bottom of the hill was close at hand. "I guess the bridge is o. k.," he added, to Fred.

"Looks to be," was the reply. "If it wasn't, there would be a sign up, I guess."

"Whoop her up!" cried Matt. "I dare you to make a mile a minute, Joe!"

"Not to-day, Matt!" was the quick answer.

Out on the bridge rolled the big touring-car. Joe had his eyes on the road and so did Fred. Both gave a cry of horror, and Joe put down both feet hard, thereby throwing out the power clutch and applying one set of brakes. Then he threw off the power at the wheel and jammed on the emergency brake.

But it was too late. The front wheels of the

touring-car had touched two of the loose planks and pushed them ahead. A bump and a crash followed, and the machine swung around and hit the bridge railing. One rear wheel settled in an opening between the planking and the other hung over the edge of the bridge.

"Look out! The bridge is going down!"

"Don't get caught under the machine, fellows!"

"The car is going to slip down on the rocks!"

"Jump out, before you get caught!"

Such were some of the cries that rang out as the car settled down amid the planking. Matt was the first out, and Paul, Bart, and Harry quickly followed. Then came a cracking from one of the bridge beams, and the big touring-car trembled and settled still more.

"I guess it is over!" came from Fred. He looked at Joe. "What do you make of this?" he questioned, seriously.

"We are in a bad fix," was the answer.

The other boys descended from the automobile. Joe looked around hastily to see if there was any danger of fire. There was not, and for this he breathed a sigh of relief.

"What a rotten bridge this must be!" said Bart. "They ought to have signs up, warning people."

"Is the machine damaged much?" asked Harry.

"I don't know," answered his brother.

"It's a good thing the car didn't drop off onto the rocks," said Paul. He kicked over one of the loose planks. "Why, I declare!" he exclaimed. "This looks bad to me."

"What?" asked several of the others.

Paul did not reply at once. He got down on his knees and looked the planking over with care. While he did this, the Westmore boys and Fred inspected the touring-car.

"I don't think the machine ripped up this planking!" cried Paul, presently.

"You don't?" exclaimed Fred.

"No; I think somebody loosened the planking before the car struck the bridge. Look here and here. Those are the marks of some kind of a crowbar that was used to pry up the planks with. Boys, this is some kind of a trick!"

"A trick!" repeated Joe.

"Who would dare to play such a low-down trick as that?" questioned Harry.

"Si Voup might do it," murmured Matt.

"Oh, but, Matt, he wouldn't run such a risk—nobody would! Why, all of us might have been killed!"

"Well, I think it was done on purpose—at least,

the planks were loosened by somebody," said Paul, firmly.

"Maybe the authorities are going to repair the bridge and they loosened the planks for that purpose," suggested Bart. "But if so, they had no right to leave the bridge in such a dangerous condition."

"Whoever did it is responsible for the damage to the auto," declared Joe. "And if we can find out who is guilty I'll make him pay the bill."

"Yes, indeed," added Fred.

What to do with the ponderous machine they did not know. Joe climbed down under the car and looked at the connecting rods and the shaft.

"Pretty well bent," he said, mournfully. "I guess she will have to go to the repair shop."

"Can we run her at all?" asked his brother.

"I don't know. We'll have to get her out on the road first."

To get the touring-car out of the hole and off the dilapidated bridge was quite an engineering problem. But all of the lads set to work with a will, taking off their coats, collars, and ties for that purpose.

"I'm afraid you'll not get to that ball game today," said Joe, with a rueful smile.

"Forget the game!" cried Paul. "We are all

sorry this happened, Joe, and we'll do what we can to straighten matters out." And the other lads expressed themselves in the same vein.

The boys were strong and used to work, and at last they devised a way of raising the machine, by using one of the stoutest of the planks as a lever. Then, when the car was on the bridge once more, they rearranged the planking, nailing it down by means of a hammer from the tool-box, and then pulled and pushed the automobile back to the foot of Jack's Hill.

"Now I'll try the engine and see how she works," said Joe, and, while he took his place at the wheel, Fred took hold of the crank and gave it a vigorous turn or two.

"Got your spark on?" asked the stout youth, as the engine failed to respond to the cranking.

"Yes, and the gas, too," answered Joe.

Fred tried the crank again, and then Harry took hold. But all the turns they could give to the fly-wheel failed to start up the motor.

"The engine is dead!" announced Joe. "Wonder if I can find out what the matter is;" and thus speaking he leaped down from his seat and unlocked the hood of the touring-car.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DISABLED TOURING-CAR

THE other boys gathered around with interest while Joe, Harry, and Fred made a close inspection of the machinery of the touring-car. The cylinders seemed to be intact and also the magneto and batteries. They tested each spark plug, and then went over the oiler and the pipe feeds from the gasoline tank.

"I guess the trouble is under the car," said Joe, and got down to see.

"Maybe you're out of gasoline," suggested Bart. "I noticed some running from the car while she was in the hole on the bridge."

Joe could see nothing of this from under the car, so he got up and opened the reservoir at the top.

"Gone—every drop of it!" he announced.

"How much did you have when you started, Joe?" asked Matt.

"Ten or twelve gallons—enough to take us a hundred miles or more."

"Then it certainly leaked out on the bridge," said Fred. "But I didn't hear it drip."

"It must have run along the woodwork without making any noise," said Harry. "The jounce into the hole sprung a leak in the reservoir. Well, we can't do anything until that reservoir is repaired," he added, dolefully.

"I am glad it is only the gasoline tank," said Fred. "We might have broken a good deal more."

"I am afraid something else is wrong," answered Joe. "Even with the reservoir empty, the engine should have started up on what is in the pipes and cylinders. But it didn't give a single explosion."

"Well, we are stalled!" sighed Paul.

"You fellows might walk to the nearest town and get a ride in some other way to Barton Park," said Harry. "You haven't got to stay here with us."

"Think I'd leave you in the lurch that way?" demanded Paul, reproachfully. "Not much!"

"I am going to stick with you," added Bart. "We have got to do something to get this car back."

"I don't want to take it back to Lakeport," answered Joe. "As it has got to be repaired, we may as well take it to Dacey's in Brookside and see what he can do with it."

"Joe, it's going to cost something to mend this car," said Fred, and his face showed his anxiety.

"I know it—but it can't be helped."

The boys stood around and talked the matter over, and at last it was decided that Harry and Link should walk to the nearest farmhouse and try to get a horse and buggy to take them to Brookside. There they would call on the proprietor of the repair shop and ask him if he could send out another automobile to haul in the Corsen car.

"We'll have to pay even for that job," said Joe. "But I don't see any way out of it. A team of horses can't pull this machine up and down the hills."

From the top of the hill, Harry and Link saw a farmhouse nestling among some trees and they hurried in that direction. In a swing on the lawn they saw a pretty girl of fifteen, playing with a kitten.

"Why, it's Minnie Zane!" cried Harry, recognizing a girl who had once attended the Lakeport grammar school with him. Link also knew the girl, who arose and shook hands with them.

"We are in a peck of trouble," said Harry, and explained the situation.

"Papa and mamma have gone to Barton Park," said the girl. "I didn't want to go, because some

other girls are coming over to pay me a visit. Papa took our best horse and buggy, but you can have the other. But you will have to hitch Billy yourselves."

"We can do that easily enough," said Link.

The girl showed them where the buggy could be found, and took them to the stable, and soon the horse and buggy were ready for use.

"He isn't a very fast horse," said Minnie. "But you can get him to trot, if you keep at him."

The lads were soon on the road to Brookside. The horse was old and stiff and more inclined to walk than to trot. Harry "sawed" on the lines, and even shook his whip, but all to no purpose.

"He's got his gait and he'll keep it," said Link. "Never mind, we'll get there sometime."

"I think we could walk about as fast," returned Harry. "Wish we had our bicycles. We could cover the distance in no time."

At last they came in sight of Brookside, and turned into the street leading to Dacey's garage. As they passed a corner Harry gave a cry.

"What is it?" asked Link.

"There are Si Voup and Ike Boardman in the auto."

"That's nothing—I knew they were out."

"But see who is with them! It is the fellow

named Al Milton—the chap who was run over near that other bridge!"

"What, the fellow we picked up, and the one you thought Si knocked over?"

"Yes. Wonder what he is doing with Si?"

"Maybe he stopped Si and made him fix matters up."

"Perhaps,—but Si will squirm out of it if he can."

"Are you going to tackle Si about the trouble to-day, Harry?"

"What's the use? We have no evidence against him, or against anybody. He would deny it, and laugh at us."

The two boys passed on, and a minute later stopped in front of the garage. They found the proprietor in, mending a motor-cycle, and he listened with interest to what they had to tell.

"You're in luck, in one way," he said. "I've got another big touring-car here and I was just going to try her out. I'll use her to tow your car in. You can go along if you want to."

"I can't go—I've got to return Mr. Zane's horse," said Harry.

"You go with Mr. Dacey and show him where the car is," said Link. "I'll take the horse back, and meet you when you are coming this way."

It did not take the garage man and Harry long to reach the disabled car. Mr. Dacey was in a hurry to get back to his shop, for, even though it was a holiday, he was busy. He fixed up a towing chain, and saw to it that the steering-wheel and the brakes on the Corsen automobile could be used. Then he placed Joe and Fred in charge of the towed car, while the other lads, including Link, when they met him, climbed in the car ahead. At the outskirts of Lakeport most of the boys left to go home but Fred, Joe, and Harry went on to Brookside. They were anxious to know what the garage man would have to say about the damages done.

"I can't understand about that bridge," said Mr. Dacey. "I always thought it was in good condition."

"So did I," answered Joe.

"If it's the county's fault, you can make the county pay for the damages done. But most likely you'd have to bring suit."

"How much is it going to cost to repair the car?" asked Harry.

"I don't know yet. I'll look it over carefully and give you a general estimate by mail to-morrow."

"I guess we'll have to foot the bill ourselves," said Joe. "So please don't make it any larger than possible."

"I only charge a fair price for what I do," answered the garage owner. "We can't charge fancy prices, like they do in the big cities," he added, with a faint smile.

"And we can't pay fancy prices," returned Fred.

It was a trio of anxious boys that started to return to Lakeport on foot. Not one of them was in humor to view the fireworks celebration that evening.

"Supposing he writes and says it will take two or three hundred dollars to repair the car," said Harry. "What will we do about it?"

"Oh, it won't take as much as that, will it?" cried Fred, in dismay.

"If it does, we'll have to let the car stand as it is until we can raise the cash," answered the older Westmore boy. "Though how we can raise such a sum I don't know."

"I can raise nine dollars," went on Fred.

"I've got three and a half," added Harry.

"And I have eleven and a half," said Joe. "Let me see, that makes twenty-four all told. I am sure the repairs will be more than that."

On the way Harry spoke of having seen the young man named Al Milton with Si and Ike, but the others were only mildly interested. Just now the disabled car claimed all of their attention.

"If he is a dissipated young fellow, he most likely patched the thing up easily with Si," said Joe. "Maybe they went off together to play pool and drink, and that sort of thing."

When Mrs. Westmore and Mrs. Rush heard about what had happened they were greatly alarmed and wished the boys to promise not to go out in the automobile again. To quiet their folks, the lads made as little of the accident as possible.

The fireworks were a success, and the most of the people enjoyed them greatly. The boys were out in force, and in the crowd were Si Voup and Ike Boardman. But the bully and his crony took care not to encounter the Westmore boys and their chums, and they left before the celebration was at an end.

On the day following the Fourth, Joe and Harry had to help their father at the flour-and-feed establishment. Twice during the day, Fred came in, each time on the same errand,—to learn if any news had been received from Mr. Dacey.

"Not yet," said Joe. "I suppose he must have time to look the machine over thoroughly."

"It will be a big price and I know it!" said the corpulent youth, with a long-drawn sigh.

The next morning Harry was sent off on an errand to a farmer who lived near Jack's Hill. He

had to pass Matt's house, and asked that merry youth if he wished to go along.

"Sure, I'll go," cried Matt. "Wait till I oil up my wheel." For Harry was on his bicycle.

The boys were soon on the way, and it did not take them long to do the errand. Then Harry proposed they ride down the hill to the scene of the accident, and away they started, Matt leading off.

"Don't ride on the bridge!" cried Harry. "It may be torn up again!"

"Trust me to look out!" answered Matt.

He was almost to the foot of the hill when his bicycle struck a stone. The machine veered to one side, and off went Matt into some bushes.

"Are you hurt?" asked Harry, leaping to the ground beside him.

"Nothing but my feelings," answered the irrepressible young joker.

"Oh, if that's all they'll soon mend," answered Harry, with equal lightness.

"I am going to walk down to the brook and wash up," went on Matt, looking at his dust-begrimed hands.

The two boys trundled their wheels down the remainder of the hill. As they came in sight of the bridge, they saw, standing near it, a bicycle. On

the bridge was a boy. His head was bent down, as if he was searching for something.

"Who is that?" asked Harry, and involuntarily he came to a halt, and so did his companion.

"It's Si Voup, Harry."

"So it is! What can he be doing here?"

The boys looked at each other questioningly, and then, almost by instinct, they drew to the roadside, behind some bushes. They saw that the bully was alone. He was going over every foot of the bridge with care.

"He is certainly looking for something," whispered Harry. "What can it be?"

"I'll bet I know," returned Matt.

"What, Matt?"

"Something he lost the day the bridge was torn up and we had the accident!"

"Do you really think that?"

"I do."

"Then he must be the one who tore the bridge up!"

"It looks that way to me."

CHAPTER XVII

PLANNING A TOUR

KEEPING out of sight behind the bushes, Harry and Matt watched Si Voup with care. They saw the bully move from one end of the bridge to the other, and then gaze down on the rocks and water under the bridge.

"Whatever he is looking for, he hasn't found it yet," whispered Harry, as he saw the bully straighten up and look along the road beyond the bridge. A farm wagon was coming in that direction, and Si lost no time in mounting his wheel and riding on. Soon he was out of sight. The farm wagon passed Harry and Matt and turned in the direction of Brookside.

"I'd like to know what he was looking for?" said the younger Westmore boy.

"Let us take a look ourselves, Harry."

"But he may come back, Matt."

"What if he does? If he lost something and we can find it, we can hold it as evidence against him."

The two boys hurried down to the bridge and commenced to search around just as they had seen the bully do. They found some broken nails and a part of a horseshoe, but that was all.

"He didn't lose these," came from Matt. "Looks like we were stumped, doesn't it?"

"I am going down under the bridge," answered Harry. "Come on."

Leaving their bicycles among some bushes, the boys climbed down over the rocks until they were partly under the bridge. Here it was wet, and they had to be careful not to slip into the brook, which flowed swiftly along.

"See anything?" asked Matt.

"I see some fish," returned Harry. "A fellow might get a pretty fair haul here."

It was rather pleasant in the cool shade of the bridge, and the boys sat down to rest. Both got a drink, and Matt washed his hands. He was drying his hands on his handkerchief when his eyes caught the glint of something in the water.

"There is something looks like a gold piece!" he cried, and pointed out the object to Harry.

The thing lay between two rocks, in water over a foot deep, and Matt had to bare his arm to reach it.

"Why, it's the top piece of a gold cuff-button!" cried Harry, as he took the object from his chum's hand and dried it off. "Here is where the bottom part was soldered on."

The top of the cuff-button was evidently of gold. It was oblong in shape, and in the center was an engraved wreath, holding a tiny diamond.

"This is worth something," said Matt. "Three or four dollars, at least. Wonder——"

Matt did not finish, for just then both boys heard footsteps on the bridge over their heads. Then somebody looked down at them.

It was Si Voup, and it is safe to say that the bully was far more surprised than were Harry and Matt. He stared down, and a look of amazement crossed his features.

"Hello, Si! What are you looking for?" asked Matt, who was the first to speak.

"Why—er—I—What are you doing here?" stammered the bully.

"We came down to see what you were looking for," went on Matt. "We didn't know what it was, but we thought we would help you."

"Humph! Who—er—said I was looking for anything?"

"Nobody. We saw you."

"I've got a right to stop on this bridge if I want to," answered the bully, trying to muster up his usual blustery manner.

"Say, did you drop this?" demanded Harry, holding out the top of the cuff-button in the palm of his hand.

As Si's eyes rested on the object, he gave a faint start.

"Why—er—where did that come from?" he asked.

"I asked you if you had lost it," returned Harry, in a stern voice.

"I did—this morning."

"This morning?" cried Matt.

"Yes. I was riding over the bridge a while ago and it flew off. I came back to look for it."

"Si Voup, you didn't lose this this morning at all!" cried Harry, indignantly. "You lost it the other day, when you loosened the planks of the bridge! You needn't deny it."

"I lost it this morning, I tell you!" exclaimed the bully. "I had it yesterday—I can prove it by Ike Boardman, who saw me wearing the cuff-buttons. I don't know anything about this bridge, excepting I heard you had some kind of a breakdown here. You give me my property, Harry Westmore;" and Si reached far down to get the object.

"Say, did you drop this?" demanded Harry.—*Page 172.*

Instead of handing the bully the piece of cuff-button, Harry came up on the bridge, followed by Matt.

"When did you say you lost this?" he demanded.

"A little while ago—when I was crossing the bridge," answered the bully, but he failed to look Harry in the face as he spoke.

"I do not believe you, Si Voup," said Harry, coldly. "I believe you lost it the other day—and I believe you loosened the planking of the bridge. Here, take the button. Some day, maybe, we'll prove what you did."

He turned the object over to the bully, who quickly pocketed it. Si was about to say something more, but evidently thought better of it. He turned on his heel, walked to where he had left his bicycle, and mounting, started to ride off.

"Hi, Si!" cried Matt. "Much obliged for letting us find the cuff-button top for you!"

"Humph! You needn't get fresh!" muttered the bully, and rode away as quickly as he could.

"Perhaps I ought to have kept it as evidence against him," mused Harry. "But then I had no right to hold his property."

"I'm going to ask Ike Boardman about the cuff-button," said Matt, and later in the day he did so. Ike declared he knew nothing of the broken but-

ton, and escaped from his questioner as soon as he could.

On the following day Joe received the expected letter from Mr. Dacey. In it the garage proprietor said he had gone over the touring-car with care and found both the gasoline tank and the magneto broken. One of the chassis rods was bent, likewise a fender, and to put the car in complete repair would cost from sixty to eighty dollars, according to the time taken on the work.

"Well, that is enough, but it is not as much as I was afraid it would be," said Joe, as he and Harry read the communication.

"But how are we going to raise the eighty dollars?" questioned his brother.

"I don't know, Harry. We'll have to do it somehow."

They went to see Fred, and talked the matter over at some length. By hard "scraping" the three boys managed to raise twenty-six dollars.

"I guess we had better tell our folks and try to get a loan," said Joe. "I don't see any other way to do it."

That evening they talked it over with Mr. Rush and Mr. Westmore. The fathers of the lads felt that the boys were not responsible for the accident and promised to make up the difference between

what they had raised and what Mr. Dacey's bill might be.

"But don't have any more such breakdowns," said Mr. Westmore. "They are too expensive."

"Fred tells me that you suspect that Si Voup," said Mr. Rush. "If he did such a dangerous thing, he ought to be locked up."

"We can't prove it," answered Harry. "So we don't dare to say anything for fear of getting into trouble."

Joe went to see Mr. Dacey and told the garage man to make the repairs as soon as possible. He said he would surely have the car ready for them by the following Wednesday.

"All right, then," answered Joe. "We'll come and get it Thursday morning, and pay you your bill."

"You ought to make the county pay that bill," went on the garage proprietor. "The authorities had no right to leave the bridge in that condition."

"I spoke to Mr. Tilmer about it, and he says the bridge was inspected only a short while ago and found to be all right. The planks were loosened by somebody."

"Then that somebody was a first-class rascal!"

"I agree with you."

"Do you suspect anybody?" went on Mr. Dacey, curiously.

"Yes; but, as we have no proofs, we can't say anything."

With their heads full of automobiling, time hung heavily on the boys' hands while the touring-car was in the repair shop. On Saturday Fred had occasion to go to Brookside for his father, and he rode around to the garage on his bicycle. He reported that work was progressing rapidly and that the machine would surely be ready for use by the next Thursday.

"I think we ought to begin to plan for that tour, if we are going to take it," said Harry. "If we don't hurry up, before we know it half the summer will be gone."

"Let us talk it over to-night, at my house," said Fred, and so it was arranged.

Mr. Corsen had turned over to the boys several road maps and books containing directions for running cars throughout that State and the States adjoining. The boys pored over these for two hours and mapped out half a dozen imaginary tours, to take from ten days to three weeks.

"Let us ask Mr. Richard Shale; he used to travel around a good deal," said Joe, and the following morning they saw Paul's uncle. He told them much

about the roads, and helped them to map out a route that would be fairly easy running and would not take them too far away from the cities and towns.

"How many are going on the trip?" asked Mr. Shale. "Only you three?"

"Oh, no; we expect to ask some more boys," said Harry. "We were going to ask Paul, for one."

"He is crazy to go,—but he didn't dare to say so, thinking you might wish to take some of the others."

"We'd like Paul along first-rate," said Fred.

"Paul has relatives in some of the towns on the route. You could stop at some of their houses."

Paul was called in, and was delighted with the invitation to become one of the crowd.

"But you must let me pay my share of the expense," said he. "If not, I won't go."

"Well, we'll all have to share the general expenses, that is understood," answered Joe.

"How many are you going to carry?"

"Well, the car seats seven people, but if we want to carry much baggage we had better limit the crowd to five and use the extra space for suit-cases, and so forth."

"I know Matt would like to go."

"And I'd like to have him—he is so full of

fun!" cried Joe. "But then there is Link, and Bart, and some of the others."

"Link has got to help his father this summer. Mr. Darrow is putting up a kitchen addition to his house and he said Link might as well help as not, and learn the carpenter trade."

"And what of Bart?"

"He said something about going to Oakville, to visit his cousin."

"Why, we expect to go to Oakville!" cried Harry. "We might take him that far."

On Monday the boys held another meeting and called in Matt. He said it would tickle him to death to go, and in his delight he went out in the yard and stood on his head. He said he had an uncle in one of the towns and he knew that this relative would be glad to have the lads stop there for a night or two.

Then the boys talked it over with Link, Bart, and some of the others. As mentioned, the carpenter's son could not go, and Bart said he could not go farther than Oakville. The other lads were already off on their vacations.

"Then that settles it," said Joe at last. "We'll go five strong, and carry Bart as far as Oakville."

"I've got news!" cried Matt, who had just re-

joined the others, having been off on an errand for his mother.

"What is that?" questioned Harry.

"Si Voup, Ike Boardman, and some other lads are getting up an automobile tour."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIRE AT THE GARAGE

THE other lads listened to Matt's announcement with interest.

"Where did you hear about Si's tour?" questioned Harry.

"Down at Marrell's grocery store. Si was bragging what a fine trip he expected to take. He is going to take Ike and two others with him."

"Who are the others?" asked Fred.

"Two lads from Camdale. Their names are Darcy and Hicks."

"I know them by sight," said Joe. "They are both rather well off, and that is why Si takes to them, I guess. The whole bunch smoke cigarettes and play pool and billiards down at Riley's."

"Wonder where they are going," said Paul.

"I didn't find out," answered Matt. "But Si said they expected to have a dandy time."

"Well, I hope we don't run across them," said Joe. But this wish was destined not to be fulfilled, as we shall see later.

The lads decided to start on the trip bright and early on the next Monday morning, and letters were immediately written to various relatives and friends who lived along the line of the proposed tour, notifying them that the boys were coming. Then the lads set about getting their things ready for the trip.

All of the boys were anxious to know if the touring-car would be in as good shape as before the accident, and Matt and Paul decided to accompany the Westmore boys and Fred to Brookside on Thursday, to get the automobile from the repair shop, which was located in the rear of the Dacey garage. The boys went on their bicycles, and a happier crowd it would be hard to imagine.

"We'll have the time of our lives on that tour!" cried Harry, as they spun along.

"If only the weather stays good," said Fred.

"Oh, it is going to be fair," answered Matt. "I consulted three almanacs, and all they mentioned were showers."

"Almanacs are not always reliable," said Joe. "But let us hope we don't get too much rain. Of course, we are bound to have some,—and I'd rather have it that way, otherwise the roads will be terribly dusty."

The boys were still some distance from Brook-

side when, on gaining the top of a rise, Joe noticed a heavy column of smoke going up from the town.

"What is that?" he questioned. "A factory or a fire?"

"I don't know of any factory in that direction!" cried Matt.

"What direction is it, Matt?" asked Fred, quickly.

"Why, I think that is down Main Street, near Parker Road."

"That's where Dacey's garage is!" burst out Joe. "Oh, can that fire be there!"

"We'll soon see," answered his brother. "Come on!" And he put on a burst of speed.

Alarmed by the column of smoke, which kept growing thicker every moment, the five boys rode on as rapidly as the condition of the road permitted.

"It must be a barn with a lot of hay," said Fred. "I don't know of anything else that would make such a smoke."

"It might be oil," answered Harry.

"Yes, and they keep a lot of it around the garage," returned his brother.

As the boys neared the town they saw that all the people in Brookside were in a state of excitement. Men and boys were running from all di-

rections, some carrying buckets and pails, for the fire department of the town was a primitive one, consisting of an old-fashioned engine, drawn by men with a rope, a hose-cart run by the boys, and a wagon with several long painters' ladders.

"What is burning?" yelled Joe, as they rode past a man who was running in the same direction.

"Baxter's barn!" answered the man. "But it looks like half the town would go, in this wind."

"Baxter's barn!" repeated Harry. "Why, that is right next-door to Dacey's garage!"

"Yes, and the wind is blowing towards the garage!" added Joe. "Come on, let us see if they got the auto out!"

The others needed no urging, and in less than a minute the five lads wheeled down into the main street of Brookside. Here they met the fire engine and the hose-cart just going to the conflagration. Everybody was excited, and men and boys were yelling wildly.

The barn that was burning was a large affair and was used by a local dealer for the storage of baled hay and straw. The hay and straw were burning fiercely, and a fresh west wind was sending down a cloud of smoke all around the garage next door, so that the low building was all but hidden from view.

"The garage is doomed!" cried more than one person, and so it seemed, for to work in such a smoke was well-nigh impossible.

"Did they get any of the autos out?" asked Joe, of one of the men near the fire.

"Got out one machine," was the answer. "It's over in Mall's lot."

The boys turned back and looked at the car. It was a runabout and not the automobile on which their hearts were centered.

"Joe, supposing that car is burnt up!" groaned Harry.

"Oh, we can't let that car burn up!" burst out Fred. "Can't we get at it somehow?"

The boys looked around, and presently saw Mr. Dacey and one of his helpers run from the garage, the former with some account books in his arms and the latter carrying a box of tools.

"Mr. Dacey, where is our machine, the Corsen car?" cried Joe, running up to the man.

"It's in the—the back building!" gasped the garage proprietor. He had been working to save his things until he was almost exhausted.

"Can't we run it out somehow?"

"Can't do it!" yelled the helper. "The gasoline is back there and it may explode at any minute!"

"How much gasoline?" asked Fred.

"A barrel and a half. And there is a lot of oil there, too."

At the mention of the oil and gasoline the crowd fell back, for all realized the danger, should the gasoline explode. The smoke swept down the street, causing many to cough.

"Is the machine ready to run out?" asked Joe, catching the helper by the arm.

"Sure, it's ready. But you can't get in to it. It's right close to the gasoline."

"Is there a back way in?"

"Yes, but you can't run it out that way—the fence is in the way."

"We'll rip the fence down," answered Joe. "Come on, fellows."

Leaving their bicycles in a vacant lot, the lads, led by Joe, ran around to the back of the garage, where was located the repair shop. Here the smoke was also thick, and they had to crouch low to the ground to keep from being smothered.

"Joe, look out for that gasoline!" warned Paul. "It's mighty dangerous stuff."

"I know it, and if you'd rather go back, do it," answered the older Westmore boy.

"Oh, I'll help get the fence out of the way. But

I don't know about going into the building," was Paul's reply.

For a moment the smoke lifted and all the boys saw the fence, which was within ten feet of the rear door of the garage. Between the fence and the repair shop was a platform, having a vault in its center, so that a machine could be run out over it and be repaired from underneath.

"Hi, what are you doing there?" cried a voice, and a man came running from a store not far from the fence.

"We are going to try to get a valuable auto out of that shop," answered Harry.

"You ain't got no right to pull down the fence!" went on the man, for some of the boys were already at work on the boards and had several loose.

"We'll take the right," cried Joe. "The fence will burn anyway."

"You leave the fence alone!"

"Come on, boys, all together!" commanded Joe, paying no more attention to the man, and with a will they forced the somewhat dilapidated fence over, sending it with a crash onto the platform of the yard and thus covering the open vault.

As the fence went down it sent back the smoke, and for an instant the boys caught sight of the back doors of the garage. They were only partly open.

"There is the car—I see it!" yelled Fred.

"Look out—there's gasoline stored there!" yelled the man who had ordered them to leave the fence alone.

"I see one of the barrels," answered Harry. "Wonder if we can't roll it away."

He ran to the barrel, and so did Paul and Matt. Not without an effort they tipped it over and started it rolling away from the fire. They had to fight their way through the smoke and burning whisps of hay and straw.

In the meantime Joe and Fred ran to the back doors of the garage and opened them. Just beyond the doors they saw the Corsen car, all ready to run. The back was towards them.

"Crank her up, Fred!" shouted Joe, and leaped around into the driver's seat.

Fred sprang to the front of the car and grasped the crank. His eyes were so full of smoke he could scarcely see. From the barn came a crash as some flooring gave way, and an increased volume of smoke swept through the garage.

For a second Joe waited in an agony of mind. If the engine refused to respond to the cranking, more than likely the big touring-car would be lost, for there was no time in which to roll it from the building by hand, and get it to a place of safety.

But then came a swift chug-chug and the engine hummed merrily.

"Look out back there, I'm coming!" yelled Joe, and set the lever on the reverse. Back shot the car, with Fred clinging to the radiator. The smoke swirled around the boys and the machine, and Joe had to guide the car by instinct more than reason. It passed out of the doorway, rolled over the cracking and snapping fence, and into an alleyway beyond.

"Have you got her?" came from Harry, and he rushed up, followed by Paul and Matt.

"Clear the alleyway!" called out Joe, and all the others ran ahead to do so. Then the older Westmore boy backed the big touring-car to the street beyond and ran it several blocks away.

A cheer went up from the crowd when it was learned that the big touring-car had been saved, and Harry, Matt, and Paul were praised for having rolled the barrel of gasoline out of harm's way. The bravery of the boys stimulated some of the men, and they ran into the repair shop and got out the half-barrel of gasoline, some cans of lubricating oil, and a quantity of tools and automobile tires.

In the meantime the fire department of the town had gotten to work, and a stream of water was being poured on the side of the garage. It was seen

BACK SHOT THE CAR, WITH FRED CLINGING TO THE RADIATOR.
Page 188.

that the barn and its contents were doomed, and the one effort now was to save the adjoining property.

Fortunately the wind shifted, carrying the sparks and burning brands into a vacant lot. Word had been sent to Lakeport for aid, and the fire department from that town responded. By noon the fire was gotten under control.

"Well, I am thankful we saved the car," said Joe, after the excitement was over, and the boys had had a chance to wash up at George Dixon's home. "If that had been burned up, I don't know what we would have done."

"Caser is mad because you tore down his fence," said George. "But some of the firemen told him he ought to be thankful, for with the fence down they were better able to save his property."

"We couldn't stand back for that fence," said Harry. "If Caser wants to make a kick, let him." But the boys heard no more about the fence.

George Dixon invited the lads to stay for dinner, but they declined, as they knew their folks would be anxious to learn about the conflagration and to know that the boys were safe.

"We'll settle with Mr. Dacey, if we can find him, and then go straight home—and take the touring-car with us," said Joe.

When they found the garage man he shook each warmly by the hand.

"You did nobly, boys," he said. "It was grand to roll that gasoline out of the way and thus prevent an explosion. I haven't any insurance—rates are too high—and I don't know what I should have done had I been burned out. The damage by smoke won't amount to much." And then he told them to consider the bill for repairs paid, that he did not want a cent of their money.

CHAPTER XIX

THE START OF THE TOUR

"WELL, now we won't have to ask father and Mr. Rush for any money," said Harry, as the boys were on the way home, some on their bicycles and the others in the touring-car.

"Yes, and it will give us so much more spending money on the trip," answered his brother.

"It was very kind of Mr. Dacey to give us a receipted bill without paying," was Fred's comment. "But I reckon we saved him from a big loss."

"Most likely," said Harry. "If that gasoline had exploded it would have been good-by to that garage."

When the boys got home they had to tell their story in detail. The news of the saving of the touring-car had preceded them and also the story of the barrel of gasoline.

"You took a big risk, Harry," said Mr. Westmore, seriously. "I don't want you to take such a risk again."

"But, father, we didn't want the car burned up!" pleaded the son.

"I'd rather have the car burn up than you, Harry."

The touring-car had been smoked up a little, but it was easily rubbed off and aired. The repairs had been made in a thorough fashion, so that the automobile was practically as good as new.

That afternoon, Joe and Harry had to go on an errand down to the lake front. There they met Joel Runnell and his daughter Cora, who had come to Lakeport on business.

"Well, how goes it?" asked Joe. "Did you settle that matter of property with Mr. Boardman?"

"No; it is in a worse condition than ever," said the old hunter, sadly. "I am afraid Cora and I will have to give up the cottage after all."

The boys were interested, and the old hunter told them that Mr. Boardman now claimed the property as his own. Some money had been paid by the aunt who had left the place to Cora, but no receipts could be found.

"The receipts were left with an old woman, a Mrs. Padderkins, who was a nurse for the aunt," explained Joel Runnell. "Now Mrs. Padderkins is gone and we don't know where to look for her. If we could find her I think she could

prove that Boardman got his money and that the property is free and clear."

"Why not advertise for Mrs. Padderkins?" suggested Harry.

"That is what I am going to do," answered the old hunter; and then he and his daughter went on their way.

On Friday the Westmore boys took out some of their friends for a long ride. They gave the automobile a good test, and when they came back they said they thought the touring-car fit to go anywhere. They had already looked over the tool-box and the repair kit with care, and placed aboard an extra shoe and two extra tubes. Now they added two spark plugs and several other things. Saturday was spent in oiling up, filling the reservoirs with gasoline, and in packing their suit-cases.

The route the boys had chosen was to take them to Camdale first, and then to Gardendale. After that they would strike roads that were new to them.

On Sunday the boys went to church and Sunday-school. It rained a little, and this made them somewhat anxious. But by night it cleared off, leaving the roads in prime condition.

The start was to be made from the Westmore home, and all of the boys to go were on hand by nine o'clock. They had written to Mr. Corsen

about the trip, and a letter had been received, wishing them a good time. Quite a crowd collected to see them off.

"Si Voup and his crowd started off yesterday," said Matt. "Sidney Yates just told me."

"Where did they go to?" asked Harry.

"Gardendale."

"I'd not care to start on Sunday," said Paul. "It wouldn't seem right."

"Just the way I look at it," answered the fun-loving Matt.

Matt had provided himself with a big horn, and he took great pleasure in blowing this as loudly as possible. The boys had a flag on the auto—the flag belonging to Mr. Corsen.

"Everybody ready?" cried Joe, at last, after a final inspection of the car, to make certain that every bolt and nut was tight.

"All ready!" was the answering cry from the others.

"Then crank her up, Fred, and let her go!"

Harry, Matt, Paul, and Bart were in the tonneau of the car, along with a miscellaneous collection of suit-cases. On the back was strapped a flat trunk. Joe was at the wheel.

Fred cranked up and leaped into the seat beside the driver. The engine chug-chugged merrily and

Joe let in the low speed. Off rolled the big touring-car, while the folks left behind set up a buzz of good-bys, and waved their handkerchiefs.

"Have a good time!"

"Don't forget to write!"

"Look out for accidents!"

"Good-by, everybody!" yelled Harry. "We are off for the time of our lives!"

"You won't see us again in two years!" added Matt, and then in his joy he stood up on his hands in the car, kicking his legs high in the air.

"What a boy!" laughed Laura. And then, as Matt resumed his normal position, she waved her handkerchief at him. Then everybody gave a final shout and a wave and the touring-car passed out of sight around a corner, on the road to Camdale.

The long-wished-for tour was at last begun.

"Oh, this is simply glorious!" exclaimed Paul, as he filled his lungs with the fresh morning air. "I can't really realize yet that we are off."

"He's got to help mend a tire or two, to come down to earth," said Matt, with a grin. "Say, Joe, can't you let something happen to the car, so that Paul will have to get to work and know he is touring?"

"Just wait, you'll all have something to do before this tour comes to an end," answered the lad

at the wheel. "But I don't want anything to happen just yet."

"Oh, I was only fooling," said Matt. "I hope we come through without a single puncture, or anything."

"I am afraid you are hoping too much," said Fred. "You must remember that——"

A sudden bump directly under him caused him to stop speaking. Joe threw out the clutch and put on the brake, and the car slowed down.

"What is the matter?" cried Bart.

"The tire is flat!" announced Fred, looking over the fender. "I reckon we've got a puncture already."

"A puncture!"

"And only two miles from home!"

"Say, fellows, don't this beat the nation!"

"It's Matt's fault!" grumbled Harry. "He wanted something to happen. Let us make him fix it."

"Say, have you really got a puncture?" questioned the lively youth, seriously, as the car halted and the boys got out one after another.

"It certainly looks like it," answered Joe. "Anyway, the wheel has gone flat. I'll jack it up and see."

They got out the jack and raised the wheel from

the ground. As Joe spun it around slowly Harry gave a cry.

"There is the trouble, a lath nail!" And he pulled it from the tire.

The boys looked at each other very seriously for a moment, and then Matt burst into a wild fit of laughter, and the others followed. Here they were but two miles from Lakeport, on a tour that was to last hundreds of miles, and one tire had already to be repaired.

"At this rate we'll make about five miles a day," said Paul. "Maybe we better shove the machine back and walk."

"Nonsense!" cried Joe, sturdily. "We'll have a new inner tube in that shoe in a jiffy. Just get it out of the box under the back seat."

"Aren't you going to repair this tube, Joe?" asked Bart.

"Not now. We can do it to-night, after the day's run is over."

By means of the tire irons, Joe and Fred soon had the rim of the wheel off and the shoe with its inner tube followed. Then the boys inflated the other tube a little and slipped it in place of that which had been punctured. Soon the new tube and the shoe were on the rim of the wheel again, and Joe snapped the little rim into place. Then Harry,

Bart, and Matt took turns in pumping the tire up until, by the gauge Joe carried, it registered seventy pounds' pressure.

"There you are!" cried Fred, as the tools were being put away, along with the punctured inner tube. "That didn't take so long."

"Twenty-two minutes," said Bart, who had looked at his watch.

"We'll be able to do it in even less time after we get used to it," said Joe.

"But you didn't repair the tube," said Matt.

"That won't take so long. All we'll have to do is to put a little patch of rubber over the hole to-night and let it dry until morning. There is no use in doing that now because we don't want to waste the time, and besides, a quick repair like that isn't usually as satisfactory as one made when a fellow has time to go at it just right."

"Pooh, that wasn't anything after all," declared Matt, lightly. "Just a little lingering by the way-side;" and the way he said this caused all his chums to grin.

It had been agreed between Joe, Harry, and Fred that they should take turns at running the car, each "spelling" the others an hour at a time. But really difficult bits of running were to be left to Joe, for it was considered that he could manage

the big touring machine a little better than the others.

They soon rolled through the streets of Camdale, and there Fred had to leave a message at one of the stores for his father. As he was coming away, he was confronted by Jerry Wardock, a loutish kind of a fellow, who had headed the Camdale Baseball Club, a nine that had stood in with Si Voup's club and which had been refused admission to the Lakeport League.

"Hello, you fellers are off touring, ain't you?" cried Wardock.

"We are," answered Fred, coolly. He did not like Jerry Wardock in the least.

"Si Voup is off touring, too," went on Jerry.

"So we heard—but it doesn't interest us," returned Fred.

"He is going the same way you are, ain't he?"

"I don't know—and I don't care."

"Huh! Maybe you will care—if you meet Si and Ike on the road," went on the rowdyish lad, with a suggestive squinting of one eye.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Fred, quickly. "Did they say anything about us?"

"I ain't telling all I know, Fred Rush. But Si and Ike won't let you git through so easy; no,

indeed!" And, with a knowing wink, Jerry Wardock walked off.

When Fred went back to the car he told the others of the interview. All were intensely interested.

"Do you imagine Si and Ike will dare to lay some kind of a trap for us?" asked Harry.

"I don't know what to think," answered his brother. "I haven't forgotten that bridge."

"Nor have I. Well, all we can do is to keep our eyes open."

At Gardendale the touring boys stopped for lunch. They did not go to the hotel, but to a modest restaurant where things were cheap, for their spending money was limited and they had to use it judiciously.

As they were coming away from the restaurant, they saw a car shoot past. It contained five persons.

"There is Si Voup's turnout!" exclaimed Matt.

"Who is the fifth person?" asked Bart.

"That is the young fellow named Al Milton," answered Joe. "I don't understand how Si and Ike have taken up with him after they ran him down."

The Voup crowd did not see our friends, and left the town in a cloud of dust, moving in the direc-

tion of Rallings, where Joe and the others expected to spend the night.

Inside of half an hour the automobile boys were once more on the way, this time with Fred at the wheel. They had a smooth road ahead, and when the way was straight and clear the stout youth "let her out" to thirty and thirty-five miles per hour. He might have gone even faster, but Joe objected.

"If it was our car, I might do it," he said. "But we must remember that we can't take chances with another person's property."

They reached Rallings at five o'clock and then decided, as it was clear and light, to push on to Fair Oaks, eighteen miles further on. They found that the Voup car had gone on ahead and that Voup expected to spend the night at Carson, ten miles beyond Fair Oaks.

"Let them go ahead," said Bart. "I am sure I don't want to see them again."

"I'd feel safer to be ahead of them," answered Joe. "If we are ahead, they can't set any trap for us."

They pushed on, and just outside of Rallings saw a touring-car stalled at the side of the road. It was the Voup car, and the occupants were looking at one of the wheels.

"They have had an accident!" cried Harry. "Shall we stop?" He was now at the wheel.

"No, don't stop!" answered Joe.

"Make out you don't see 'em," put in Fred.

Harry increased his speed and soon they were beside the other car. They saw one of the boys come out, as if to halt them, but then Si Voup pulled the fellow back. Soon the disabled car was lost to sight in the distance.

"I guess they wanted help," said Paul.

"Yes—but not from us," answered Joe.

"I don't know that I would have given 'em help, even if they had asked for it," said Fred. "It wouldn't be a matter of life and death to stick there until somebody else came—and I am sure Si and Ike wouldn't help us if we were in a fix."

CHAPTER XX

CAUGHT IN A STORM

THAT evening the boys stopped at the home of one of Fred's relatives. They were only going to make a call and then put up at a hotel, but the man, who was the stout youth's uncle, would not hear of this.

"We've got plenty of room," said he, "both in the house and the barn. Put your machine in the barn, and we'll fix you all up with a place to sleep."

"But it's so much of a crowd!" protested Fred.

"That's all right," answered Mr. Latimer. "The more the merrier. We don't have many visitors, and your Aunt Sarah and I will be glad of the change."

The boys were tired out and went to bed early; first, however, mending the punctured inner tube. As it was only a small hole, it was repaired with ease. They told the Latimers the news from Lakeport, and about the fire in Brookside, and also gave the particulars of their first day's run, the latter

being put down in a notebook by Paul, who was made official recorder for the time being.

The automobile boys saw nothing that evening or the next morning of the Voup crowd, and rightly reasoned that the disabled car had been taken to a shop for repairs. In going over a depression in the road, Si had loosened one of the springs, and this had to be tightened up before the machine could be run again.

The next morning the boys rode to a village called Horton's Springs. They had lunch there, and then commenced to climb a series of hills leading to Rainbow Cliffs. They had been warned that some of the hills were difficult, and consequently were rather anxious concerning them.

"I am afraid we are in for a storm," said Bart, looking at the sky. "See how black it is getting, over to the westward."

"If it comes, we want to get under some kind of shelter," answered Bart, who had no desire to get wet.

"I don't see much in the way of shelter on this mountain road," came from Harry, as he looked ahead. "The ground is too poor for farming or pasture."

They kept on, the way growing more difficult at every step. Joe had to come down from high speed

to second, and finally he set the lever at low. The big touring-car barely crawled along.

"Shall we get out and walk?" asked Harry.

"I think you had better," answered his brother. "Somehow, we don't seem to have the power that we ought to have."

"But this isn't such an awful hill," protested Fred, as all but Joe sprang from the car. "A six-cylinder car ought to take it with ease."

"Maybe you can run the car better!" cried Joe, a little testily.

"Oh, no, Joe; you are doing all right. But I think there is something the matter with the car."

"Well, what?"

"How about gasoline?" came from Matt. "I don't know much about cars, but I know you can't run without juice."

"Why, say, we didn't fill up this morning!" cried Harry. "I was going to speak of it, but it slipped my mind."

He hopped back into the car and, taking up the seat beside Joe, uncovered the gasoline reservoir. It was all but empty, and what liquid was there could not flow down the pipe because of the slant of the car on the uphill grade.

"No wonder you can't get any power!" cried Harry. "All the gasoline you are getting is what

splashes into the pipe because of the uneven roadway. Wait, I'll turn on the emergency tank. Better throttle her down a little, or maybe you'll get too much gas."

The emergency tank was a small reservoir built beside the larger one, and held enough gasoline to run fifteen or twenty miles. As soon as Harry turned this on the engine commenced to pick up power and soon was running as strongly as ever.

"Jump in, everybody!" sang out Joe, and the others were quick to do as bidden. "What a gawk I was not to think of the gasoline!" he added, as they went spinning over the road and up to the top of the next hill. He could now run on second speed with ease and soon shifted to high.

"The storm is coming!" cried Matt, a few minutes later, and then a distant rumble of thunder broke upon their ears. It was followed by a rush of wind, and then some scattering raindrops commenced to fall.

All of the boys had their eyes open, and presently they espied a big open shed, setting in the midst of a clearing. It was a shed that in years gone by had been used by some lumbermen, but was now deserted.

"Might as well go in there as anywhere!" muttered Joe, as the rain came down more heavily, and

he turned from the road and ran directly under the big shed.

They were none too soon, for a minute later there came a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a roar of thunder, and then the rain came down in a torrent, shutting out the landscape on all sides. The boys rolled the touring-car to a far corner of the shed, and put up the top and side curtains, that the interior of the machine might be kept as dry as possible. The shed had many holes in the roof, so to keep entirely dry was out of the question.

"I think it is only a summer shower," said Bart, and he was right. Inside of half an hour the rain stopped coming down, and a little later the clouds rolled away and the sun came out with dazzling brightness. All the trees and bushes glistened with raindrops, and the rough road was a mass of sticky and treacherous mud.

"What do you think of it?" asked Harry, as he and the others walked out to look at the road.

"I don't like it," answered Joe, frankly. "We have got to go up and down some pretty stiff hills, according to the guidebook, and if we got to skidding it might be all up with us."

"That's true," came from Fred. "I'd not want to go down a steep hill with the road as slippery as it is now."

They walked down the road a short distance and saw that quite a steep descent was before them. Whether they could hold the big touring-car in that slippery mud was a problem. None of the young tourists cared to take the risk, even with chains on the wheels.

"We'll wait awhile, until it dries off," said Joe, at last, and so they waited, in the meantime pushing the car from the shed and putting down the top once more.

But, though the sun shone brightly, the rough road did not dry off as quickly as they expected. There were puddles everywhere.

"Well, I must confess I am stumped!" declared Joe, when it commenced to grow dark. "It is bad enough to travel such a road in daylight—I'd not dream of doing it after the lamps had to be lit."

"I reckon we are booked to stay here all night!" cried Matt. "See any hotel near by? Why, certainly, sir, the Hotel De Woodshed, rates 'steen dollars per week. Fresh air guaranteed in every apartment. All rooms have running water." And his remarks caused a general laugh.

"Say, why not camp out in the woodshed?" suggested Fred. "It will save us hotel bills anyway, and I don't think it will be any worse than camping out on Pine Island."

"That's all right, so far as it goes," answered Harry. "But what about supper, and breakfast in the morning?"

"We've got that bag of doughnuts my aunt gave me," said Fred.

"And that quart of peanuts I bought," added Matt.

"And three bananas and six apples," responded Bart.

The eatables were brought forth and inspected, and the lads decided that they would make a supper of them, and trust to luck for breakfast. The idea of "camping out" appealed strongly to all, and they set to work immediately to make themselves at home in a corner of the big shed, using the automobile seats and the curtains for that purpose. They also lit a campfire and sat around this while they ate their scanty meal and told stories.

"Do you think any wild animals will come to disturb us?" asked Fred, as they got ready to turn in.

"Maybe an elephant or a hippopotamus or two will come along," answered Matt, gravely. "I understand they love to chew up touring-cars with boys in them."

"I don't think we'll be bothered," said Paul. "Just the same, if anybody wants to remain on

guard, he has my permission. I'm going to turn in."

He found a fairly comfortable corner and lay down, and soon the others followed, Fred making himself at home on the back seat of the tonneau. Fortunately for the youths it was warm, so there was small danger of any of them taking cold.

Harry was the first to get up, and he was glad to see the sun shining brightly. He ran down to the roadway and saw that it had dried off fairly well during the night.

"Is breakfast ready?" sang out Matt, as he got up and stretched himself. "Did anybody ring the bell?"

"You'll get breakfast when we reach Mountain View and not before," answered Harry. "All up!" And he caught Bart by the foot to rouse him.

"How far is the next town?" questioned Paul.

"About three miles," answered Joe. "But we have several hills to cross."

"Have you enough gasoline?"

"I hope so. If not, somebody will have to walk to town for more."

The touring boys spent little time over their toilet, and inside of ten minutes the car was run out on the road once more and they were on the way,

with Harry at the wheel. Going down the hill was a little dangerous, but the younger Westmore boy took his time, not giving the automobile a chance to get beyond his control. The other hills were comparatively easy, and by eight o'clock they rolled into Mountain View and came to a halt in front of the only general store of which the place boasted. Here they purchased ten gallons of gasoline, and then asked the storekeeper if there was any place where they might get breakfast.

"Ain't no regular tavern around here," drawled the man. "Folks that wants meals generally goes to the Widder Snagg fer 'em."

"Where is that?" questioned Joe.

"Down the road a pace. Second house on the right. It's got a stoop full o' honeysuckle in front o' it."

"Then the Widow Snagg for us!" cried Fred, as he took the wheel. "Come on, I'm hollow clear down to my toes!"

They found the widow in her garden, picking flowers. Matters were quickly explained, and she agreed to give them a breakfast of bacon and eggs, bread and coffee, for twenty cents each. While waiting, the boys washed up in the shed, and combed their hair.

It was a well-served meal, and never did any-

thing taste better, for the scant supper the night before and the early morning ride had whetted their appetites. The widow was a good soul and gave them all they wanted. She asked about their trip, and then told them something of what was before them.

"The road is all right for about ten miles," she said. "But then you commence to wind in and out among the cliffs, and you'll have to be very careful or you'll go over one of 'em. Once a horse and buggy went over the cliffs and the horse and the man and his wife were all killed."

"That's cheerful news, to say the least," was Joe's comment.

"The guidebook says the road is good, but one must run his machine with care," said Fred, who was reading the directions. "I guess it's not so bad as the widow thinks. Country folks like to pile it on sometimes."

"Well, it's your turn to drive the car," answered Joe. "Not but that I'll do it if you wish," he added, hastily.

"No, I'll run it," said the stout youth. "I am not afraid."

They were about to move off in the automobile when they heard a shout, and saw a young man running towards them.

"Why, it is Al Milton!" cried Harry.

"How do you do!" cried the young man, cordially, as he came up. "I saw your car when you were at the store."

"Oh, we are getting along finely," answered Joe, somewhat coldly. He had not forgotten what he had seen at Washingtonville and on the road.

"Are you going through to Akertown?"

"We are."

"Would you mind taking me along? I am very anxious to get there by to-night, and I can't get anybody here to drive me over."

Joe looked at his brother and the others. He did not know just what to say.

"We—er—we might take you," he stammered. "We are pretty well loaded."

"So I see. Well, if you'll take me to Akertown, and get me there by four o'clock this afternoon, I'll pay you ten dollars."

CHAPTER XXI

A GREAT RACE

Al Milton's offer was so unexpected that the automobile boys were much surprised by it. He hastened to explain himself.

"As some of you know, I am a traveling salesman. I have a chance to get an order for a big bill of goods if I get to Akertown before the other fellow. That's why I presume on your generosity in taking me along. And I'll pay the ten dollars gladly."

"What do you say, Fred?" asked Joe. Then he introduced the other boys to the young man.

"I'm willing," answered the stout youth. "We have room for one more passenger."

"His ten dollars will pay for the gasoline you use on this trip," remarked Paul.

The young man got in the car, and away they spun down a road that was fairly level and smooth. Several times Joe and the others were on the point of asking the new passenger about Si Voup and his crowd, but they did not know how to broach the

subject. It might bring up the question of the condition Milton had been in at Washingtonville, and this Joe and his chums shrank from mentioning.

"If he wants to say anything, let him do it," whispered Joe to Harry and Paul.

"Maybe he is ashamed of his actions and would prefer not to say anything about them," answered the younger Westmore boy.

They soon came to the cliffs, and at some points found the road exceedingly narrow. It wound in and out among the mountains, with the high rocks on one side and the deep valley on the other. Fred ran the car slowly and kept his feet ready for use on the clutch and the foot-brake.

"We could go over the cliff without half trying," said he, after a particularly bad turn had been passed.

"Somebody else is coming!" cried Bart, as an auto horn sounded behind them.

Those in the tonneau of the touring-car looked back, and Al Milton gave a cry of wonder.

"It's that other salesman!" he exclaimed. "He has gotten somebody to carry him to Akertown in a touring-car! I thought he was going to Siller's Crossing to take the train!"

In the car behind were several young men and a man who was middle-aged. The latter was the

salesman, and he stood up to get a better view of those in the car ahead.

"He sees me!" cried Al Milton. "Now he will do his best to get to Akertown ahead of me!"

"Well, they can't pass us on this road," said Harry. "It would be suicide for them to try it."

Another turn of the cliff road was made, and they reached a point where the highway broadened out a little. Again the horn sounded from the car in the rear and then this came closer, until the radiator was but a few yards behind the tonneau of the Corsen automobile.

"Pull up to one side and let me pass!" cried the young man who was driving the second car.

"That's right, clear the road, or I'll have you fined!" added the middle-aged salesman. And then he glared savagely at Al Milton.

"Put on a little speed, Fred!" whispered Joe. "And don't get out of the road too much. If he wants to pass, let him take his chances."

"Oh, don't let him pass!" cried Al Milton, hastily. "I must get to Akertown first! I'll give you twenty dollars instead of ten if we leave them behind."

"It's only a four-cylinder car," said Harry, examining the machine in the rear. "We can run away from that if the road is good enough."

"Joe, you can take the wheel if you wish," said Fred. "It's nerve-racking to drive around these cliffs. A fellow doesn't know what is coming."

Joe slipped into the driver's seat and grasped the wheel. There was a good road ahead and he turned on the throttle and advanced the spark. At once they bounded forward. Then came another turn and he had to slow down once more.

The second car kept at their rear, the chauffeur urged on by the salesman who wanted to beat Al Milton in getting to Akertown. It was a dangerous proceeding, for had the Corsen car stopped somewhat suddenly a collision would have been inevitable.

"He'll try to sneak past us the first chance he gets!" cried Harry. "Joe, watch him!"

"I am watching him!" was the reply. "But he may have an advantage in knowing the road."

On went the two cars, around another cliff and then up a long hill. Here the weight of the Corsen car told and the lighter turnout ranged up beside it. The road was moderately broad, so that there was now plenty of room for the second car to pass.

"Going to try to get ahead of me, eh?" shouted the man in the second car. "Well, it won't go, Milton!"

"That remains to be seen, Mr. Parley."

"I am going to get to Akertown first, and don't you forget it!" shouted Gus Parley. "Give us room, or we'll run into you!"

"You've got all the road that is coming to you," answered Fred.

"Well, here is where we leave you behind!" shouted the young man at the wheel of the second car, and he opened up his throttle and also his muffler. Ahead shot the four-cylinder car. It was of the racing type, and the chauffeur had been in more than one race, as Joe and his friends afterwards found out.

When the top of the hill was gained, the four-cylinder car was about a hundred yards ahead of the other. Joe looked ahead and saw that at the foot of the hill there was a straight stretch for a mile or more. Then the course lay along a river, which ran through the town for which they were bound.

Joe's sporting blood was now up, and, without consulting his chums, he loosened the brake a little and raced down the hill after the other car. When the level stretch was reached, the machines were once more side by side.

"Oh, I hope you can beat them!" cried Al Milton, earnestly.

"I'll do my best," answered Joe.

"I don't care so much for that order as I care to get ahead of Gus Parley. In the past he has played me some mean tricks."

"If we don't win this race it won't be my fault."

The occupants of each car were now worked up to the top notch, for all realized that a strenuous race was on. Joe did what he could to increase his speed, and so did the strange chauffeur, and side by side they whizzed along for the best part of a mile. But then a farm wagon appeared on the road ahead, and Joe, who was on the outside, had to slow down to let the turnout pass. This gave the other car quite a lead.

"You'd better try to pass him before you reach Radley," said Al Milton, "for the road is narrow after you pass that settlement, and he'll block you, sure."

Thus warned, Joe watched his chance, and, seeing a clear road ahead, turned on the full power of the big machine. At once the touring-car fairly leaped forward. Bart, who was just behind Joe, leaned forward and kept the horn blowing.

As the Corsen car crawled closer and closer, the driver of the car ahead did all in his power to increase his speed. The mufflers on both cars had been cut out, so the noise of the engines was deafening. Joe used his foot accelerator as well as the

hand throttle and advanced the spark as much as he dared.

Just ahead was the settlement of Radley, consisting of a blacksmith-shop, a church, and several houses. The blacksmith came running out to see what the noise meant, and waved his arm wildly.

"It's against the law to run so fast!" he cried. "Stop, or you'll be arrested!"

"I guess he doesn't like automobiling," was Harry's comment. "It is no good for his business."

Joe paid no attention to the warning cry, but watched his engine and the road ahead. Not a hundred yards further the highway narrowed considerably, and on either side was a muddy ditch.

Suddenly the Corsen car shot ahead of the other and struck the narrow roadway. Looking back, Harry saw the driver of the second car working frantically at his levers. Then came louder explosions than ever from the engine. The second car commenced to crawl up again.

But Joe was on his mettle, and now he nursed the engine he was driving as never before. As a consequence, inside of a mile he drew a long distance ahead of his rival.

"They can't catch us!" cried Fred, at last. "Joe, you have won the race!"

"Don't crow yet," said Al Milton. "It is a good many miles to Akertown."

"They can't pass us, and I know it," said Fred, firmly.

Further and further behind dropped the second car. Then of a sudden came a loud explosion, and looking back, those in the Corsen car saw the second machine slow up and run into the ditch, where it stood still.

"They have had a blow-out!" cried Bart.

"Yes, and they are stuck in the ditch," added Matt. "That ends this race."

"And we win!" cried Harry.

"Well, I am glad it is over!" gasped Joe, as he slowed up and wiped the perspiration from his face. "When I started I didn't expect to get into any such race as that."

"You did splendidly!" cried Fred. "I'll take the wheel now and you can rest."

"How long will it take them to fix that wheel?" questioned Al Milton.

"Half an hour, if not longer," answered Harry. "Remember, they have got to haul the machine out of the ditch first."

"Yes, and they may have to go back to that blacksmith-shop for help," added Bart.

"And then the blacksmith may arrest them for

speeding—that is, if he is a country constable," suggested Fred.

"He won't arrest 'em if he gets a job that pays well," returned Joe.

It was decided to go straight through to Akertown, and Fred ran half the distance and Harry the other half. They made good time and arrived in the town by half-past two.

"I want you all to take dinner with me, at the hotel," said Al Milton. "And I'll pay that twenty dollars, too."

"We'll see about the money later," answered Joe. Then he held a consultation with the others, and all decided that they would allow the young man to pay for the dinner and no more. He left them eating a late repast while he hurried off to get the order he desired. In that he was successful, and came back beaming with pleasure.

"I've put a spoke in Gus Parley's wheel," he said. "I got twice as big an order as I expected. Wait till Parley hears of it; he'll be so mad he won't know what to do."

There was a bar attached to the hotel, and Joe and the others were half-afraid Al Milton would ask them to drink. But he did not mention the matter, nor did they see him drink anything himself.

"Perhaps he is ashamed of what he did before and has turned over a new leaf," whispered Harry to Fred.

"I hope he has," answered the stout youth. "I think it is awful when a young man takes to drink."

"I am tremendously obliged to you for what you have done for me," said Al Milton to the boys, on parting. "If I can ever do any of you a good turn, I'll certainly do it."

"Where are you going from here?" asked Joe.

"Oh, to a dozen towns or more, along the line of the railroad and the trolley," said the young man.

"Then perhaps we'll meet again, soon."

"I hope we do," answered Al Milton, smiling broadly.

The boys did not remain in Akertown, but pushed on to Carton, where they stopped for the night at a hotel. Then they crossed the river and struck out for Crosley, where they were to spend the night with an aunt of the Westmore boys.

CHAPTER XXII

MAKING NEW FRIENDS

THE boys found their reception at Crosley so pleasant that they remained there two days. During that time they gave the touring-car a thorough inspection, tightening up the nuts and bolts and giving the grease-cups and oil-holes what they needed.

Mrs. Westmore was sorry to have them leave, and on the morning of their departure put up a basket of lunch for them, so that they would not have to stop at any roadhouses before night.

"The places are not very nice between here and Rockledge," said she. "You will do better to stop and lunch in the woods."

"That will just suit us—with such a spread as you have given us!" cried Harry.

It was an ideal day for a run, and they started off in the best of spirits. They had written letters to the folks at home and one to the Corsens, and posted them. Harry was at the wheel, and he sent

the touring-car along at a speed of from fifteen to twenty miles an hour, up hill and down.

So far they had seen nothing more of the Voup car, and they wondered if the bully and his cronies were still on the road and following them.

"Maybe they had such a breakdown that they had to give it up," said Paul. "Well, it is none of our affair, even so."

The boys were in such high spirits that they sang and whistled as they rode along, and Matt told some funny stories that set all the others to roaring. When they passed through a village they cheered the people who came out to see them, and got many a cheer in return.

"I'll be sorry to leave you," said Bart, with a sigh. He was to drop off at a town a hundred miles farther on the tour.

"And we'll be sorry to lose you," returned Joe, quickly.

Noon found them gliding smoothly along over a road that wound in and out through a dense woods. Beyond this was a stony ledge and a quarry, where stone was gotten out for a railroad nearby.

"Let us stop here for lunch," suggested Fred. "It's better than down by the quarry."

The suggestion suited everybody, and the

touring-car was run off the road and in between a number of trees, where the ground was firm and safe. Then the boys got out the basket of good things Mrs. Westmore had provided and made a spread of them on some newspapers.

Suddenly an explosion caused the lads to leap to their feet. At first they thought something had happened to the automobile, but then they realized that the sound had come from the direction of the quarry.

"They must have set off a blast," said Joe.

"That's it," added Fred. "They usually set 'em off just before they knock off for dinner."

The boys had run out into the road and were gazing in the direction of the quarry, when Harry let out a cry:

"A runaway, and he is coming this way!"

Harry was right. A horse attached to a two-seated carriage was running wildly down the road. The animal had been scared by the loud blast from the quarry and was completely beyond control.

In the carriage sat two ladies and two girls, and all were so badly frightened that none of them knew what to do. The reins had been dropped and were dangling on the horse's hind legs, adding to his fright.

"Let us try to stop him!" exclaimed Joe, and ran out in the middle of the road. The others followed him, until they formed a line completely across the highway.

On and on came the frightened steed. The girls and the ladies were screaming, and two of them jumped up, as if to leap from the turnout.

"Don't jump!" yelled Joe. "Keep your seats!"

Seeing the blockade of human forms before him, the horse slackened his speed for a moment. This was what Joe was looking for, and on the instant he made a leap and caught the animal by the bridle. He held on, despite a lunge the horse made, and then Bart came to the rescue by catching hold on the other side.

For several minutes there was a lively struggle, and once or twice it looked as if the frightened steed might break away. But Joe and Bart retained their hold and spoke reassuringly to the animal, and presently he quieted down.

"Oh, I am so thankful you stopped him!" gasped one of the ladies. "I was afraid we should all be killed!"

"Won't he run away again, Aunt Kate?" asked one of the girls.

"I hope not."

"What started him—the quarry blast?" asked Joe.

"Yes. They set the blast off just as we passed," said the second lady. "It was very careless of them."

"Yes, they should have warned you," added Bart.

"Maybe they thought we were far enough away," said one of the girls. "The road doesn't run so very close. But we were too close for Jasper. He is such a nervous animal."

"We must thank you for what you did," said one of the ladies, to Joe and Bart. "It was very brave of you to do it."

"Oh, we didn't do so much," answered the elder Westmore boy.

"I don't think the horse would have run much farther," added Bart.

"You don't know Jasper," returned one of the girls. "Once he took the bit in his teeth while papa was driving and ran over two miles. But generally he is safe to drive."

"Let us look over the carriage and the harness before you go on," suggested Harry. "Something may be broken."

The ladies and the girls got out, and the boys looked everything belonging to the turnout over

with care. While they were doing this, one of the girls chanced to see the touring-car under the trees and the spread of lunch on the grass.

"Oh, you are having a picnic, aren't you!" she cried.

"We stopped at the wayside for lunch," answered Fred. "We are on an auto tour."

"Is that so? Where from?"

"Lakeport."

"Indeed! I know a girl from that town—Gertrude Shale. I met her at my cousin's in Brookside."

"Gertrude Shale!" cried the stout youth. "Why, her brother is with us—Paul Shale."

Paul was called over and introduced. The girl said her name was Mary Rowan and that one of the ladies was her mother. The other lady was her aunt, Mrs. Dean, and the other girl was a cousin, Grace Dean.

"I've heard my sister speak of you," said Paul, and then he introduced his chums, and told about the tour they were taking.

"We are out to lunch in the woods, too," said Mary Rowan. "We drove my aunt and my cousin out just for a good time. But we didn't think our horse would run away."

"Well, he didn't run very far," returned Harry.

After the excitement, the ladies were glad enough to rest where they were. The boys led the horse under the trees and tied him fast. Then Mrs. Rowan noticed the food still remaining untouched on the newspapers spread on the grass.

"Why, we are keeping you from your lunch!" she cried.

"Won't you join us?" asked Joe, politely.

"We'd be pleased to have you," added Fred.

"It would be jolly to lunch together," came from Matt.

"Oh, mamma, wouldn't that be nice!" whispered Grace Dean.

"We might add our lunch to yours," said Mary Rowan, with a smile.

"Maybe you'd get stuck if you did that!" cried Harry. "Although my aunt put up something very good for us," he added, loyally.

At first the ladies demurred. But the young folks were anxious to lunch together, and finally Mrs. Rowan and Mrs. Dean consented. Then a hamper was brought forth from the carriage, and the girls produced a table-cloth and napkins.

"I see what's coming!" cried Paul. "You'll have to reset the table!"

"Yes, our table-cloth was too fancy for them,"

added Matt, and at this reference to the newspapers everybody laughed.

The ladies were still a little nervous and glad enough to sit down and rest. With the ice broken, the boys and girls became quite friendly, and told a good deal about themselves. The "table" was rearranged, and then it was found that the crowd was so great the newspapers would have to be added to the table-cloth after all, and this brought forth another spell of laughter. There was plenty to eat, and the girls had brought with them a bottle of lemon juice and sugar.

"We'll have to find water, if we want lemonade," said Mary Rowan.

"I saw a spring, a little way up the road," said Paul, and he and Matt went after the water. Then all sat down to enjoy the novel repast.

During the meal the boys learned that Mrs. Dean and her daughter Grace were only on a visit to that neighborhood.

"We live in Bartonville, on Buell Lake," said the lady. "Are you going to tour that way?"

"Yes, we expect to go through Bartonville in a few days," answered Joe.

"Then you must stop and see us. My daughter and I are going home to-morrow. If you can ar-

range it, I will be pleased to have you dine with us." Then the boys learned that Mr. Dean was the proprietor of a shingle mill on the shore of Buell Lake, and they promised to call whenever they reached Bartonville.

The ladies were rather afraid to pass the quarry again with the horse, and Joe suggested that he be allowed to drive the steed.

"I'll go along," suggested Bart. "The girls can ride into town in the auto."

"Oh, won't that be nice!" cried Grace Dean. "I've never had a ride in an automobile."

"Neither have I," added her cousin.

"Well, you take care and don't tumble out!" warned her aunt.

"Oh, we'll strap 'em in, like they do babies in baby-carriages," said Matt, solemnly, and this brought forth a general laugh.

The luncheon things were cleared away, and the touring-car and the carriage gotten ready for use. Then the girls got in the tonneau of the machine, and off they started for Bainridge, where Mrs. Rowan lived. The carriage followed at a much slower rate of speed, Joe driving, with Bart beside him.

When the Rowan home was reached the touring-car was at the door. But Fred and Harry had run

the machine around several "blocks," thus giving the girls quite a long ride.

"It was too lovely for anything!" declared Mary.

"I wish papa would buy an auto," added Grace. "Say, when you come to Bartonville, won't you show my father how nice it is? Maybe he'll get one then."

"Yes, we'll show him," answered Harry. Then good-bys were said, and the automobile boys went on their way, the girls waving their handkerchiefs after them.

"A nice bunch of folks," was Paul's comment. "I wish we were going to see more of them."

"Paul is smitten!" cried Joe. "Never mind, Paul, maybe we'll see the Deans at Bartonville."

"Sure we will!" declared Matt. "Didn't Mrs. Dean promise us a good dinner? I wouldn't miss that for the world. By the lunch we had to-day, I should say those folks know how to cook."

The picnic under the trees had somewhat delayed the boys, but nobody complained.

"It is going to be a clear night," said Joe. "I move we eat what is left of the lunch for supper and then light up and run to Coville before we turn in. My aunt said there was a pretty good hotel at Coville."

"Suits me," answered Fred, and the others also agreed.

They spun along until half-past six, and then stopped at a farmhouse and bought a quart of milk and some biscuits that had just been baked. These were added to what the boys had left of the mid-day lunch, and made a satisfying meal.

"Now for Coville," said Harry, who was at the wheel, and off they started at a speed of about twenty miles an hour.

They were just coming into the town, and were running at less than twelve miles an hour, when of a sudden two men appeared in the roadway, each with a shotgun in his hands.

"Halt!" cried one of the men. "Halt, or we'll bu'st yer tires ter flinders!"

"HALT, OR WE'LL BU'ST YER TIRES TER FLINDERS!"—*Page 234.*

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CONSTABLE OF COVILLE

"WHAT is this, a hold-up?"

"Are they going to rob us?"

"They look ugly enough to do anything."

Such were some of the words that came from the automobile boys of Lakeport as they found themselves confronted on the road into Coville by the two brawny men with shotguns. Each of the men had his weapon leveled at a wheel of the touring-car.

Harry came to a sudden stop, and the two men stepped up to the side of the automobile.

"Look out, Sim, that they don't try no funny work," said one of the men.

"I got my eye on 'em, Luke. If they try anything this here gun o' mine is bound to go off,—an' you know what kind o' a shot I am."

"What does this mean?" demanded Joe.

"Reckon you know what it means well enough," said the man called Luke. "We've been a-waitin' fer you to come along."

"What for?" asked Fred.

"Oh, you needn't try to play innocent!" went on the man, sarcastically.

"We don't know what you are talking about," said Joe. "If this is a joke it is a mighty poor one, and we want you to let us pass."

"You ain't goin' to pass, 'ceptin' to pass up to the Coville lockup."

"The lockup?" queried Harry. "What for?"

"Fer speedin', an' fer runnin' off without payin' a hotel bill, an' fer runnin' over a lot of chickens, an' a valuable dog, an' a lot more. Maybe you don't know me. I'm Luke Stogger, an' I'm constable in this deestrict." And now the speaker threw back the flap of his coat and showed a shining star pinned on his vest.

"You have got the wrong crowd, Constable," replied Paul. "We have done none of the things you mention."

"Oh, you can't fool me!" returned Luke Stogger, emphatically. "I got the telephone message from Crosley. I know all about you! You'll spend the night in the Coville lockup, that's what you'll do!"

"But I tell you you are making a mistake!" cried Joe. "We have positively done no wrong."

"And if you make us go to the lockup, we'll have

you sued for damages," added Fred, who had a great horror of being arrested, even though unjustly.

"I know what I'm a-doin'," answered the constable, doggedly.

"How are ye goin' to git 'em to the lockup, Luke?" questioned the farmer who had been called in to aid the arm of the law in making the arrest.

"They got to run their machine down there," answered the constable. "Now then, start her up slow, an' don't attempt to scoot away, or I'll fire at you an' not the machine," he added, harshly.

Joe and the others attempted to argue, but all to no purpose. The constable said he had received telephone orders to arrest them, and they must go to the lockup.

"Supposing we refuse to run the car to the jail?" asked Matt.

"Then I'll git a team an' tow it in, an' charge you for it," snapped back the representative of the law.

There seemed no help for it, and so Joe took charge of the car and ran it slowly in the direction of the town. The constable walked ahead, and directed the farmer to walk behind, so that the prisoners might not escape.

"We might scoot around him and speed for it!" whispered Fred to his chums.

"We ought to knock him down and ride over him," answered Harry, angrily. "We have done nothing to warrant arrest."

"If we try to run away, it will make matters look black for us," answered Joe. "Better face the music."

The news had spread, as it usually does in small places, and by the time the lockup in Coville was reached, the touring-car was being followed by a crowd of men and boys, all anxious to know what would be done with the tourists.

"They ought to catch it heavy," said one man. "One of them fellers come near runnin' over me one day!"

"Yes, an' one of 'em killed Jake Martin's setter dog," added another.

"I see one of 'em runnin' about fifty miles an hour onct," came from an old farmer. "They hain't got no right to go that fast. They ought all to be in jail!"

The lockup at Coville was a small building that had once been a paint-shop. The touring-car was stopped in front of the door, and Joe and the others alighted.

"I guess you can walk right in an' leave your machine where it is," said the constable.

"One minute, please," said Joe, who had made

up his mind what to do. "That car is worth nearly four thousand dollars. If I leave it in your care, I'll hold you and this township responsible for it."

"Ain't no car wuth that much money," murmured the constable.

"Yes, it is, and if you take it from us, you have got to take the best of care of it."

"Well, I'll put it in Baker's barn. It will be safe enough there. I'll git Tom Baker to watch it."

"Now, another thing: I want to know the exact charge upon which we are being arrested, and I want to know who makes the charge. Then I want you to send for the justice, or the judge, so we can have bail fixed at once. Then I'll send for our lawyer."

"Well—er—you'll have to wait about the charge," stammered the constable. He was taken back by Joe's business-like manner. "I got word to stop a dark-red touring-car with a lot of young fellers in it. The man said if we caught you he'd come on an' make a charge."

"A dark-red touring-car!" cried Harry and Fred, in a breath.

"Yes."

"Our car is dark-green!"

"What's that?" asked the constable, much startled.

"Our car is dark-green, there is nothing red about it."

"That ain't so, it's red."

"You must be color-blind!" cried Matt.

"Say, Jackson, ain't that machine dark-red?" questioned the constable, turning to a man beside him.

"Red?" returned the man. "Well, hardly. It's dark-green, almost black."

"That's what it is," added another bystander.

"Say, Luke, you sure are color-blind if you took this for a red car," said the farmer who had helped to halt the boys on the road.

"Wait a minute—I've got the number on a paper!" cried the constable, much confused. "Here it is, 16171. I guess that is right enough," he added, triumphantly.

"No, it isn't," answered Joe. "Our number, as you can see, is 16191."

"By gum! So it is!" gasped Luke Stogger, and looked much crestfallen.

"You mistook the nine fer a seven, Luke," said one of the men. "You better look closer next time."

"An' better git a pair o' glasses, so you can tell red from green," added another.

"My—er—my eyes has been a-troublin' me

lately," said the constable, lamely. "That's why I couldn't make out the color o' the car, an' why I took thet nine fer a seven." He looked sheepishly at the boys. "Maybe, after all, you ain't the young fellers I'm after."

"How many were in that crowd you want?" asked Harry.

"They told me five over the telephone, but I thought maybe they hadn't counted straight an' meant six."

"Say!" began Fred, suddenly, when a warning look from Joe and Harry made him stop short. "Oh, it doesn't matter," he added, hastily.

"Well, are we free to go on" demanded Joe, as there came a pause.

"I suppose so," grumbled the constable. "I ain't never made no mistake like that before," he added.

"Well, my advice is, be careful in the future," said Joe, severely. "You had no right to stop us as you did, and we could have you punished for it if we wanted to."

"Oh, let it go," said Luke Stogger, eagerly. "You look like nice boys, an' I'm glad I ain't got to lock you up." And then he disappeared in the crowd.

Relieved to think they had gotten out of the trouble so quickly, the boys got into the touring-car

once more and ran along the main road of the town until they reached the hotel. All were anxious to talk over a certain subject, but Joe warned them to keep quiet until they were sure no one was listening. They housed the machine in the barn, and then went to the rooms to which they had been assigned.

"It must have been Si's car the constable was looking for," said Fred, at last. "That is dark-red and the number is 16171."

"That is true," returned Harry.

"He wanted him held for speeding, and for running over some chickens, and a valuable dog," said Matt. "That would be just like Si and Ike."

"Yes, but didn't you hear about the hotel bill?" said Paul. "Would Si and Ike be dishonest enough to beat a hotel man out of his bill?"

"Perhaps—if they were short of cash," answered Bart. "Both Si and Ike can be pretty mean at times."

"Maybe we ought to have told the constable what we know," mused Harry. "I am not going to uphold Si and Ike in any shady transactions."

"That hotel man will follow them up," came from Joe. "He knows the number of their car, and he can soon find out who owns the machine. If

they owed any money, they were foolish to run away."

All of the boys were tired out from their long run, and slept well. They were up bright and early, and before breakfast looked over the machine, oiled some of the joints and springs, and filled the tank with gasoline.

"I'll be sorry to leave you," said Bart. "But I shall be glad to see my relatives."

"Well, the best of friends must part, as the button said to the suspender," put in Matt, who was bound to have his little joke.

"We'll miss you, Bart," said Joe, and the others said the same.

The run to Oakville was made by noon, and they stopped at the home of the big lad's relatives for lunch. At Oakville they received letters from home, and also a communication from Mr. Corsen, and post cards from Violet.

"Oh, we must send post cards!" cried Harry, and mailed them without delay. They also wrote several letters. They made light of their troubles, not wishing to worry anybody.

"Now, have a good time!" cried Bart, on parting. "And get back to Lakeport safe and sound!"

It was sixty miles from Oakville to Bartonville, on

Buell Lake, where the Deans lived, and the automobile boys calculated to cover the distance that afternoon with ease.

"I think it is my turn to take the wheel," said Fred.

"Right you are," answered Harry.

"Fred, you want to go slow on some parts of this road," warned Joe. "The book says there are some sharp curves and bad grades."

"I'll be on the lookout," answered the stout youth.

They passed out of town, and then ran up a long low hill. The course was a winding one, and Fred ran with care. Then, however, came a straight stretch down-grade, and he opened up the throttle a little.

"Not too fast," said Joe. "There is a bridge to cross at the bottom of the grade."

Over the little bridge rushed the touring-car, and then up a second hill. On both sides were trees and bushes. Then came another hill, higher than any of the others, and Fred had to throw the gear into second speed.

"Fine scenery here," declared Paul, as they gained a high and cleared space.

"Oh, this is glorious!" cried Fred, as he shifted again to high gear. Then the touring-car struck

the other side of the hill, and he gave something of a gasp.

Before them was a down-grade worse than any they had yet encountered. More than this, the rains had washed out the roadway in many spots, leaving dangerous ruts and gullies. Part way down the hill a small tree had blown over and lay across the highway.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE ROAD ONCE MORE

"Stop her, Fred!"

"We can't get past that tree!"

"We'll be sent into the gully!"

"The car will be overturned and smashed!"

Such were some of the cries that came from the automobile boys of Lakeport when they saw what was before them. The big touring-car had gained considerable headway, and was bumping down the hill at a truly alarming rate of speed.

"Shall I help you, Fred?" asked Joe, who sat directly behind the stout young driver.

"Jam on the brake!" gasped Fred, who had already thrown out the clutch and applied the foot brake. He did not dare to take his hands off the steering-wheel or his eyes off the road ahead.

Joe leaned forward and applied the hand brake as hard as he could. But even this did not stop the heavy car, and it slipped and slid along the road, Fred doing his best to guide it.

Swish! They struck the tree, and the upper

branches hit the boys in the face. But the tree held them fast, and for this all were thankful.

"Anybody hurt?" sang out Harry, who had had his ear scratched by a tree limb.

Nobody had been seriously injured, although everybody was more or less scratched. The big touring-car had slipped around sideways, and one rear wheel overhung a gully several feet deep.

"I am glad we didn't go down in that!" cried Paul. "If we had, the car would surely have overturned!"

"Who would have thought the road would be as bad as this?" gasped Fred. Now that the immediate peril was over, he was white and trembling.

"This road isn't fit for any auto," was Harry's comment.

All had leaped out into the roadway, beside the machine and the fallen tree. They looked at each other questioningly.

"Well, I don't know anything about running autos," said Matt. "But I do know you are going to have a hard time of it getting out of this mess."

"Right you are, Matt," responded Joe. "I must confess I hardly know what to do myself."

"Nothing broken on the car," declared Harry, after an inspection. "The front fender on the left side is bent, but that can easily be straightened."

"I know what I would do, to get down the hill," said Paul. "I'd use that fallen tree for a drag. One of you can steer the car, and the rest of us can sit on the tree, to add to the weight."

"I want to know what kind of a road is ahead before I move," replied Joe. "We don't want to go from bad to worse."

Joe, Fred, and Paul ran down the hill, and then followed the road for the best part of half a mile. Here, to their astonishment, they came out on a crossroad with a sign-post pointing in one direction to Oakville, and in another to Bartonville.

"Why, here is a much better road than the one we are on!" cried Fred.

"You must have gotten on the wrong road," declared Paul. "Don't you remember a distance back, where there were two roads and no sign-board? I reckon that is where you made your mistake."

"More than likely," answered Fred.

"Well, I guess we can get down to this road all right," said Joe. "But it will be no easy task, and we'll have to go slow."

The three lads were about to turn back to where the touring-car had been left, when they heard a chug-chugging down the other road, from the direc-

tion of Oakville. Then, from around a bend, a touring-car shot into view.

"It's Si Voup's car!" burst out Paul. "Say, those fellows must be following us pretty closely."

"Well, did you ever!" gasped Joe, as the car came closer and slowed up.

"What's up now, Joe?" questioned Fred.

"There is Al Milton with them again!"

"So it is! And he is running the car, too! What can it mean?"

"Don't ask me. I shouldn't think he'd want to have anything to do with them."

"Clear the track there, you fellows!" bawled the young man at the wheel of the advancing car. "Clear the track, if you don't want to get run over!"

Much astonished, the three boys fell back to the side of the road. Past them rolled the Voup car, and as they passed Si and Ike "made faces" at Joe and his chums. The young man at the wheel also grinned sarcastically. He had his cap set on one ear, and a big, black cigar was stuck in one corner of his mouth. His face showed that he had been drinking.

"Well, that beats anything I ever heard of," was Joe's comment, after the touring-car had disappeared.

"That Al Milton certainly is a queer stick," answered Fred. "Why, he nearly ran over us! And after what we did for him, too!"

"I know one thing, Fred. I don't want anything to do with him in the future."

"Nor I. I am sorry now we helped him to get ahead of that other salesman," was the stout lad's comment.

The boys walked back to where they had left the others, and told of what had occurred.

"I guess that Al Milton is no better than Si or Ike, if as good," was Harry's comment. "If he is an habitual drinker, he may lead those boys into trouble before this tour is ended."

The boys did not, however, just then give the Voup party further consideration. Their minds were occupied solely with getting the big touring-car down to the bottom of the rough hill in safety. They fixed up the tree as a drag, securing it with chains and a strap to the rear axle, and then Joe took upon himself the work of guiding the machine to the road below.

It was a perilous task, and once or twice it looked as if the touring-car might get away from them in spite of what was done to hold it back. But the boys sat on the tree and thus caused it to catch in the ground, furrowing it up as if with a plow.

"This is going to make the road worse than ever," said Paul.

"Well, maybe somebody will fix it if it gets too bad," answered Harry.

When the lower road was gained, the boys unfastened the tree and dragged it to one side, out of the way. Then they went over the touring-car with care, tightening up several nuts that had worked loose. They also straightened out the bent fender.

"We can be thankful it is no worse," said Joe. "If that car had turned turtle in the gully, it would have been all up with us."

Now that they had gained the better road, they imagined their troubles were over for the day, but they soon found out otherwise. Five miles further on, they came to where a big saw horse had been left in the road.

"Wait!" cried Joe to his brother, who was at the wheel. "I think I see a sign."

The car was stopped, and Joe got out and walked towards some bushes. Here was a bit of board, nailed to a pole. It lay face downward, and he picked it up. On the board was the following:

Bridge over Rillott River being repaired. Take old Turnpike Bridge to Bartonville.

"We can't get through this way," said Joe, holding up the sign.

"Why wasn't that standing in the road, where a fellow could see it?" queried Matt. "One doesn't look for signboards in the bushes."

"I guess I can answer that," came from Paul. "This is spite work of the Voup crowd."

"More than likely," said Joe. "They wanted us to go ahead until we reached the bridge, and then we would have to turn back."

"Yes, and we might get into more trouble," added Harry.

"Say, do you suppose they removed some signboards away back?" asked Fred, excitedly. "Maybe that's why I took the wrong road!"

"They'd be equal to it," said Harry.

"If they did, they ought to be put in jail for it," said Paul.

The boys set up the signboard Joe had found, and then turned back in the direction in which their map told them the old Turnpike Bridge was located. Here they struck some deep sand, and going had to be slow.

"We'll not get to Bartonville to-night," said Joe. "We may as well stop at the first town we come to. I'd not risk running over such roads as these at night."

It was growing dark when they reached a place called Tonk's Crossroads. They located a small hotel, and Joe ran his car up to the piazza and alighted. As he did this, a big, stout German came rushing from the establishment, waving his hands wildly.

"I vonts you to go avay!" he bawled. "I ton't vont noddings to do mit you no more!"

"What's the matter?" asked Joe, in surprise, while all of the boys looked at the German hotel-keeper with interest.

"*Ach,* I dink you vos dem udder fellers!" cried the hotel man. "Da vos makes me a lot of drubbles alretty!" And he heaved a mountainous sigh.

"What other fellows?" questioned Harry.

"Dem fellers vot vos here a vile ago alretty. Da got a mobile chust like you got. Da come in here und gits somedings to trink und to smoke, und makes a lot of noise. Von feller he preaks a vinder und he von't bay for it. I got to chase dem out mit a proom alretty! Of you pelongs to dot crowd I ton't vonts you to sthop, not for a minit!"

"We don't belong to that crowd," answered Fred. "We are alone."

The boys asked the German hotel-keeper to describe the fellows who had created the disturbance, and came to the conclusion that it had been the Voup crowd. They had been very boisterous, and the

oldest fellow had wanted more liquor, and when he could not get it, had wanted to fight.

"That must have been Al Milton," said Joe. "What a two-faced fellow he must be!"

The German and his wife were very suspicious, and it took a good deal of talking on the part of Joe and his chums to convince the couple that they were quiet and well-behaved, and willing to pay for whatever they had in the way of accommodations.

"Vell, you can shtay here," said the hotel-keeper at last. "But you must bay me in advantage, und of you makes too much noise, Katrina und me, ve drow you owid kvick!"

"You won't have to throw us out," said Harry. "We know how to behave ourselves." And then the boys paid for their supper and breakfast, and their sleeping accommodations. This appeased the hotel-keeper, and he and his wife set to work to prepare them a hearty repast. It was a well-cooked and appetizing meal, and the hungry youths filled up on it with keen satisfaction.

"Where did those other fellows go?" asked Paul.

"Dot I know not," answered the German. "Of da comes pack here I vos shoot dem alretty!"

The hotel boasted of a small barn, and in this the touring-car was stored. The boys were tired out,

and went to bed early, occupying adjoining rooms on the second floor of the hostelry.

It was about midnight when Joe was aroused by a sound which was growing familiar to him. It was the chug-chugging of a motor car that had just been cranked up. He listened dreamily for a moment, and then sat up in bed.

"Harry, what does that mean?" he cried, sharply.

"Wh—what's that?" came from his brother, who lay beside him. The room was pitch dark.

"Listen! I hear an auto motor, don't you?"

"Why, yes!" And now Harry was wide awake. "Are some of the other fellows at our machine?"

"I don't know—but I am going to find out!" declared Joe, as he leaped out of bed and rushed into the adjoining bed-chamber.

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH THE AUTOMOBILE IS STOLEN

THE next room contained two double beds, and these were occupied by all the other automobile boys.

"What do you want?" demanded Fred, who heard Joe stumble against a chair.

"Fred, is anybody down at the barn? I hear an auto motor running."

"No, we are all here!" cried the stout youth. He had kept a dim light burning, so could make out the various sleepers.

"Then I guess something is wrong!"

"Maybe the Voup crowd has come back to make trouble for the hotel-keeper," suggested Harry, who had followed his brother from the other bedroom.

"More than likely they'll make trouble for us!" was the reply.

Joe ran back to the other room and commenced to don his clothing, and his brother followed suit. By this time all of the boys were aroused. Fred ran to the window, but could see nothing, for the barn was on another side of the little hotel.

"Vot's der madder?" came in the voice of the German who owned the place.

"I don't know," answered Joe. "We hear an automobile engine. Did those other fellows come back?"

"Of da did, I soon clear dem owid!" answered the hotel-keeper. "Chust vait till I got mine gun alretty!"

It took Joe several minutes to get into his clothing and his shoes. Then he dashed out into the hallway and down the stairs, with Harry at his heels. They reached a side door, to find it locked and bolted. In another part of the house they heard the German and his wife talking excitedly in their native tongue.

It took Joe several second to unlock and unbolt the door. All the while he could hear the motor outside running, and also heard a murmur of excited voices.

At last Joe got the door open, and he leaped out on a side porch of the hotel. The night was clear, and in the yard around the corner of the building he saw several figures, and also saw a touring-car.

"Stop!" he called, loudly. "Stop! What are you doing with that machine?"

"Hurry up!" came from one of the figures in the yard. "We have no time to waste!"

"Too bad—I thought we'd get away without being discovered," said another.

Joe ran down in the yard and Harry came after him. They now saw five figures. Each of the strangers had a handkerchief tied over the lower part of his face.

"Hurry up, if you are coming!" sang out a voice from the roadway, and, turning, Harry caught a dim view of another automobile, standing near some bushes. Then this car commenced to move away.

The Corsen machine had been run from the barn to the middle of the hotel yard. As was his habit, Joe had locked the electric switch, but this had been loosened with a false key. Four of the crowd in the yard were now piling into the car, the motor of which was humming rapidly.

"Stop, you rascals!" cried Joe, and, rushing forward, he caught the remaining figure in the yard by the arm.

"Let go!" muttered the person, and struck hastily at the youth. Joe was hit in the shoulder, and he stumbled backward.

As his brother went down, Harry leaped to the front and made a grab for the unknown one. He caught hold of the handkerchief, and it came loose. Then the fellow turned like a flash and leaped into the automobile.

"Go ahead!" he cried. "We have no time to lose!"

"Al Milton!" gasped Harry, and stared at the young man in amazement. "Stop!" he yelled. "Don't you dare to run off with our auto!"

A mocking laugh was the only reply, coming from several in the touring-car. Then, before Joe or Harry could make another move, the big machine shot forward, swung out of the yard, and rolled swiftly down the road, in the direction the first car had taken.

A gunshot rang out, coming from a weapon which the German hotel-keeper fired excitedly into the air. Then the other boys came hurrying down into the yard.

"What's the matter?"

"Where is the auto?"

"Is anybody killed?"

Such were some of the questions asked by the others. Joe was just getting up from the ground.

"The—they have run off with the car!" he gasped. "After them—before they get out of sight!"

"Run off with the car?" repeated Paul. "Who?"

"Al Milton, for one," answered Harry. "I guess it was the Voup crowd."

"We can't follow the auto on foot," came from Fred.

"But we have got to do something," insisted Joe. "If they get away with the car, there is no telling what they will do with it."

"If we only had a bicycle!" groaned Fred.

"Or an airship," added Matt.

"Humph! an airship wouldn't count," answered Harry. "But a bicycle would be just the thing, unless they run very fast."

"They won't dare to do that—in this darkness," said Paul.

By this time the hotel-keeper had come down, followed by his wife and some of the hired help. Only one horse, very old and next to useless, was kept in the barn, and none of the hired help slept there.

"Vos it dem udder fellers vot stole dot mobile?" asked the German.

"I think so," answered Joe. "Say, do you know anybody around here who has a bicycle?"

At this the German shook his head. He said one young man of the town had had a wheel the summer previous, but he had swapped it in the fall for a buggy.

"Any autos around here?" queried Fred.

"Only vot goes by der door." answered the hotel-keeper.

"Well, you have got to help us get back our machine," declared Joe. "Please remember, it was stolen from your barn."

This statement almost set the hotel-keeper crazy. In his broken tongue, he declared that they had placed the automobile in the barn at their own risk, and that he was in nowise responsible. Then his wife joined in and declared that she thought all the young fellows were in league with each other, and that the taking of the second machine was but a blind, to make trouble for her and her husband. She told her husband that she wanted the boys ordered from the house, and at once.

"We have paid for our rooms and for breakfast, and we'll stay if we want to," answered Joe, firmly.

"And if we don't get that auto back, you'll hear from us further," added Fred.

"I got noddings to do mit it, noddings at all!" stormed the German. "You vos come here und all you do vos to make drouble mit me!"

What to do the boys did not know, nor was the hotel-keeper able to suggest anything. The lads went back and finished their dressing, for to go to bed again was out of the question.

"Who keeps the livery around here?" asked Harry, and, on being told, suggested that they try to

follow the missing automobile to the next large town in a carriage.

Not without a good deal of difficulty, Joe and Fred roused up the keeper of the livery stable, and explained the situation to him. He was a young man, and bright, and immediately took an interest in what they had to tell.

"I can hook up a team to my three-seated carriage and drive you over to Turners," he said. "Maybe you'll hear something about the auto there. If they went down the road you mention, they'd have to pass through Turners."

"Then let us get to Turners as soon as possible," said Joe.

A bargain was struck, and in less than half an hour the automobile boys had left the hotel with their baggage, and piled into the three-seated carriage. Joe made the German refund to them what they had paid for breakfast.

The team the liveryman drove was a good one. He carried a big lantern, and this was swung close to the road as they moved along. In the dirt the tracks of the two touring-cars could be traced with ease.

"Of course, we can't catch that machine with the horses," said the man. "But you may be able to follow 'em in another machine from Turners—provided they don't give you the complete slip."

They reached Turners in less than an hour and a half. It was now about four o'clock in the morning, and just growing a little light. At a corner the liveryman stopped his team and hailed a man who was entering an alleyway.

"What do you want?" asked the man, and the liveryman explained to the boys that he was a night watchman.

"Did you see two autos going through some time ago?"

"Sure I did," was the watchman's reply. "Crowd of noisy young fellows in 'em, too. Out for a lark, wasn't they?"

"Well, rather. One of the machines didn't belong to them."

"You don't say!"

"Which way did they go?" questioned Fred.

"Took the back road down to Buell Lake."

"What road does he mean?" asked Joe.

"I'll show you," answered the liveryman.

They passed through the main street of the town, and soon came to a split in the road.

"There is the road to the lake," said the carriage driver. "And there are the prints of the auto wheels, as plain as day."

"And that road leads directly down to Buell Lake?"

"Yes."

"Where does it run to from the lake?"

"Doesn't run anywhere, stops right there, at the old sawmill."

"Then let us go after 'em!" cried Harry, quickly. "If they find they can't go any further, we'll have them cornered!"

"I reckon you are right," and the driver of the carriage grinned.

"How far is it to the lake from here?" asked Joe.

"About eight miles."

"Then I'd like you to take us that far,—if the team can stand it."

"Yes, they are pretty fresh yet, and I'll do it," said the liveryman. He was much interested in the case of the missing touring-car, and he wanted to watch developments.

The road was fairly good, but rather rocky in spots, so that the driver had to go a little slow. Here and there they made out the tracks of the two automobiles.

"Say, look here!" cried Paul, when a little more than half of the distance to the lake had been covered. "I don't seem to see more than one set of tracks!"

"Same here," added Matt. "Do you suppose one auto followed the other?"

"It couldn't be done as closely as all that—on such an uneven road," declared Joe. "I don't know what to make of this," he continued, seriously.

"One auto must have turned off somewhere," said Harry. "But where?"

"And which machine?" added Fred. "If it was ours, that's the one we want to follow."

"Wait a minute!" cried Harry. "Here is where I play detective!"

As the carriage stopped he leaped out, and then walked to the tracks ahead. He examined those on the left of the highway with care.

"It's our car that went ahead!" he cried, presently.

"How do you know?" questioned his brother.

"By the marks from the left rear wheel. That shoe had a cross patch on it, and the mark of the patch is here, as plain as day."

"Then we are on the right trail!" exclaimed Fred. "Hurry up, let us catch 'em before they disable the car and run away!"

CHAPTER XXVI

ON THE TUGBOAT

FILLED with anxiety, the automobile boys of Lakeport had the liveryman urge up his team into a trot and set off in the direction of Buell Lake.

As the carriage proceeded, the boys kept their eyes wide open for a possible sight of the touring-car.

"Here comes a farmer with a wagon of garden stuff," announced Joe, presently. "Maybe he can tell us something about the auto."

The farmer was half-asleep, and they had to shout loudly to attract his attention.

"Wot ye want?" he asked at last.

"Have you seen an automobile on this road?" questioned Joe.

"Did I? The blamed thing 'most skeert my hosses into a fit," growled the farmer.

"Where was this?"

"Oh, 'most down to the lake. I was takin' a nap on the seat when I heard a horn honk, an' then Jenny give a wild jump, an' I had my own time

holdin' her in! Wish the blame smoke wagons was in Jericho!"

"Did the auto go down to the lake shore?" asked Harry.

"I suppose so—dunno where else it could go," and the farmer picked up his lines, started up his horses, and dropped down for another nap.

"He's more interested in sleep than he is in autos," was Matt's comment.

The carriage passed on, made several turns, and at last came out on the top of a hill overlooking a long and broad sheet of water. The sun was coming up, and the sight was a beautiful one.

But the boys were not just then interested in the sun. All looked ahead for a possible sight of the touring-car. But the road near the lake shore was hidden by trees and bushes.

"What place is that?" questioned Fred, pointing down the shore.

"That is Bartonville," answered the liveryman. "It's about a mile from where this road touches the lake."

The three-seated carriage rolled down the hill, and as they drew closer to the lake the boys became more anxious than ever concerning the touring-car. Would they be able to locate it, and if so, in what condition?

"If they ruined that car they'll pay for it," said Joe, quietly, but determinedly.

"Would they dare ruin it?" asked Paul.

"I don't know. Si and Ike get pretty reckless at times, and evidently that Al Milton is leading them astray," answered the older Westmore boy.

Another turn of the road, and they came in sight of the lake again. Here was an old dock and near it the remains of what had in years gone by been a large sawmill.

"No auto here!" cried Harry, and his tones showed his keen disappointment.

"Maybe they ran it into the woods somewhere," suggested Paul. "Let us take a look around."

All left the carriage and started to search the vicinity. Then Fred and Harry walked out on the old dock.

"Look here!" called the younger Westmore boy. "They ran the machine out here! Here are the marks, as plain as day!"

"Oh, Harry, do you think they dumped the car into the lake?" questioned Fred, in horror.

"I don't know. I am sure they ran it out here. Look for yourself."

Harry pointed to the old planking, and there they saw some dirt marks left by the tires of the machine. The marks ended at the very edge of the dock.

"They must have done one of two things," was Joe's conclusion. "Either they dumped the car overboard, which I don't believe, or else they took it away in a boat."

"Took it away!" cried Matt.

"They'd have to have a pretty big boat for a touring-car of that size," was Paul's comment.

"Maybe they had a flatboat, or a canal boat," suggested the liveryman. "There are lots of such boats on the lake—they used 'em for lumber."

The boys made a tour of the vicinity, and at last all came to the conclusion that the automobile had been carried off on some kind of a boat.

"It's a very high-handed proceeding," was Joe's comment. "I'd like to get my hands on Si and Ike, and that Al Milton!"

"Well, there is no use in our staying here all day," said Fred. "If they went off in a boat, the only thing to do is to get another boat and follow 'em, and we'll have to go down to Bartonville to do that."

"We might go back and hunt up that other car," suggested Paul.

"Oh, more than likely that is miles away by this time," said Joe. "I'll tell you what I think," he went on. "I think the crowd divided, and some of them took our auto and some the Voup car.

Those who had our machine will hide it somewhere, and then rejoin the others. Maybe they think this is a joke, but I don't look at it that way."

The boys talked the matter over, and then concluded to have the liveryman take them to Bartonville. Here the man was paid off. He put his horses in a local stable, and said he was going to hang around for a while, to watch developments.

The boys were hungry, and, coming to a restaurant, went in and had breakfast. All were more or less sleepy, yet sleep, just then, was out of the question.

"I know what I am going to do," said Joe, while they were finishing the repast. "I am going to call on the Deans, and see if I can't get Mr. Dean to aid us in some way. Mrs. Dean said he operated a shingle mill on the lake shore. If that is so, he may own some boats."

"That's the talk!" cried Fred. "We helped the ladies—Mr. Dean ought to be willing to give us aid."

They found out where the Dean home was located, and, brushing up a bit, presented themselves at the front door. The servant girl who answered their summons smiled a bit when she saw them.

"Here are the automobile young men, Miss Grace!" she called out, and a moment later Grace Dean hurried from a room to greet them.

"I am very glad to see you!" she said, as she shook hands. "Mamma and I have been telling papa all about you, and he will be very glad to see you."

"Is your father at home now?" asked Joe.

"Yes, he was just getting ready to go down to the mill. I hope you had a nice auto ride to Bartonville."

"We didn't have any auto ride," put in Fred.

"Our auto has been stolen," explained Harry.

Before more could be said, Mr. and Mrs. Dean appeared. The shingle-mill owner was introduced, and all listened with deep interest to what the boys had to relate.

"Those fellows had a big nerve!" was Bartley Dean's comment. "If I were you, I'd be apt to have them locked up for this."

"What we want to do first is to recover the touring-car," answered Joe. "It is not ours, and it is worth a great deal of money."

"Well, I'll assist you all I can. I know you rendered my wife and daughter a great service," returned Bartley Dean, warmly.

"If we had some kind of a boat we might be

able to trace the boat that carried off the touring-car," put in Fred.

"There is a little steam tug at our dock," said the shingle-mill owner. "I can place that at your service. Captain Smythe knows the lake from end to end, and nearly all the boats, too, and he ought to be able to locate that craft."

"That's the ticket!" cried Harry. "Let us go down to the boat at once!"

"I thought you were going to pay us a visit?" said Grace, reproachfully.

"Not now—perhaps we will, after we get the car back," answered the younger Westmore boy.

"I hope you do get it back," returned the girl.

The boys went off with Bartley Dean, who led the way to the dock connected with his shingle mill. Here lay the tugboat *Noxall,* used principally for towing canal boats and lumber rafts up and down the lake and the river. Captain Smythe, a short, fat man, was on board, and to him Mr. Dean explained the situation. He became profoundly interested immediately.

"Sure I'll aid you all I can, if Mr. Dean can spare the boat," he said. "Regular pirates, eh? We'll get on their trail, and make 'em give up the 'mobile, or blow 'em out of the water!" and he shook his head savagely.

"I am sorry I cannot go with you," said Bartley Dean. "But I have an important engagement for ten o'clock. If you get back by noon, be sure to come to my house for dinner. Then, maybe, I'll go out with you this afternoon."

Steam was up, and as soon as the boys were on board, the bow of the *Noxall* was turned up the lake, towards the dock at the old sawmill. The tugboat carried a crew of four besides the captain, so the boys felt well able to cope with their enemies, should they be able to locate the Voup crowd.

"It might be they would take that 'mobile to some island up the lake," suggested Captain Smythe. "They could find plenty of hiding-places on Cat Island or Bear Island."

"Does anybody live on the islands?" asked Joe.

"Not that I know of. Years ago an old hunter used to live on Bear Island, but he is dead and gone."

At the old dock they looked around once more, but found no further traces of the missing touring-car.

"Here comes the Westport ferryboat," announced Captain Smythe, presently. "I might hail the captain of that craft and ask him if he saw anything of a boat with a 'mobile on it."

"Please do so," returned Joe, quickly.

The ferryboat was rather a primitive affair, of the side-wheel order. It carried two wagons, and not more than thirty passengers. It was bound from Westport to Eastport, and then to Bartonville.

The *Norall* was sent out close to the course of the ferryboat, and Captain Smythe shouted to the other captain through a megaphone.

"What's wanted?" asked the skipper of the ferryboat, after he had ordered the engine slowed down.

"See anything this morning of a boat with an automobile aboard?"

"Saw a flatboat up the lake," was the answer. "She had something on board covered up with a tarpaulin."

"Did it look as if it might be a touring-car?" asked Joe, eagerly.

"I thought it was a coach or a wagon," answered the captain of the ferryboat.

"Which way was it bound?" asked Captain Smythe.

"Up in the direction of Bear Island."

"Was it near the island?"

"Not over quarter of a mile away, and heading for the landing."

"Hello, there, Joe Westmore!" came unexpectedly from the lower deck of the ferryboat. "What's the matter with your touring-car?"

"Why, it's Al Milton!" gasped Joe. He gazed at the young man in amazement. "What are you doing there?" he demanded.

"I am bound for Bartonville. Did you send your car off on a boat?" went on the young man.

"Send it off!" shouted Joe, angrily. "No, you and your friends stole it, that's what!"

"What?" demanded Al Milton. "I stole your car? You must be joking."

"No, I am not joking, Al Milton. You took that machine, and now I want to know what you did with it." Joe turned to Captain Smythe. "Captain, follow that ferryboat. There is one of the young fellows who took our auto, and I don't want him to get away from us."

"You must be crazy—I haven't taken anybody's auto," answered Al Milton, angrily.

"We'll soon see if you didn't," answered Joe, sternly.

The ferryboat resumed its journey for Eastport, reaching that settlement ten minutes later. But the tugboat was ahead of it, and Joe, Harry, and Fred rushed ashore, followed by the others. They watched for Al Milton, and as soon as the young man landed, they surrounded him.

CHAPTER XXVII

SOME TALK OF IMPORTANCE

"Now then, I want you to tell us what you have done with our touring-car!" exclaimed Joe, somewhat excitedly.

"It won't do for you to deny that you helped to take it," put in Harry. "For I saw you do it."

"See here, you are making a grave mistake of some sort," answered Al Milton, trying to keep calm. "I tell you I know nothing of your touring-car. When did you lose it?"

"Last night—as you well know," put in Fred.

"Where?"

"It was stolen from the hotel barn at Tonk's Crossroads," said Paul.

"Tonk's Crossroads?" repeated the young man. "I've never been to such a place. I spent last night at Westport, at the Gordon House. I can prove it, too, for the hotel was so crowded I had to share my room with another commercial traveler, named Lane."

"Do you mean to tell me you haven't been with

Si Voup and his crowd for several days or a week?" demanded Joe, sharply.

"Si Voup? You mean that young man who was suspected of running over me?"

"Yes."

"I have never been with him. Why should I go with him? If I could prove he knocked me down that day near the bridge, I'd have him arrested."

Al Milton spoke with such emphasis that the boys were dumfounded. Was he really telling the truth, or was he merely playing a part?

"Do you mean to say that you have never been with Si Voup?" questioned Fred, slowly.

"Never."

"You never drank and played pool with him?"

"Never."

"Then, if it wasn't you, it must have been your double," commented the stout youth.

"What's that—my double?" repeated Al Milton, quickly. "See here, tell me all you know—tell me where you think you saw me, and who with. Maybe I can clear up this mystery."

Thereupon the boys told their story, not only of how the touring-car had been taken, but also of how they had seen Voup and his cronies at Gardendale and elsewhere with a young man they had taken to be Al

Milton. As the story was finished, the young traveling salesman bit his lip reflectively.

"I can explain this only in one way," said he at last. "I have a distant relative named Al Melville, who looks very much like me. He is a wayward sort of a fellow, and given to drinking, and he also plays pool and gambles. The last I heard of him he was out around Cleveland, and I did not know he was coming to this vicinity. It is possible that he has fallen in with this Voup bunch, and gone on a tour with them."

"And he looks like you?" questioned Matt.

"Yes, we look very much alike, so much so in fact that when we were younger some folks used to think we were twins. But Al Melville is dissipated, and I think his face shows it."

"It does show it," answered Joe. His face flushed slightly. "I guess I owe you an apology," he stammered.

"We all do," added Fred.

"Well, we'll let it pass—since you were not really to blame," returned Al Milton.

"I am glad we were mistaken," said Harry, warmly. "I felt awful bad when we saw you at Washingtonville—or, I mean, we thought we saw you—under the influence of liquor. We thought you weren't that sort."

"I am not—and I am mighty sorry for Al Melville," answered Al Milton. "He is a good enough kind in the main, but every once in a while he breaks loose and makes a fool of himself."

The young man was much interested in the loss of the touring-car, and said, if the boys desired it, he would go on the hunt with them.

"I haven't very much to do to-day," he explained. "And I would like to see you get your car back, and also find out just what Al Melville is doing. I wonder if he knows Si Voup ran into me and knocked me down."

"You can go along if you want to," said Joe, and so it was settled. He was now satisfied that Al Milton was telling the strict truth.

"This explains many things," whispered Paul to Harry, when the tugboat was again on its way up the lake. "I thought it mighty queer that Milton should take up with Si after the latter was suspected of knocking him down with the auto."

"And it explains how it was we thought Milton drank at one time and didn't drink at another," added the younger Westmore boy.

"I think I know why they ran off with that auto as they did," said Al Milton, a few minutes later. "Day after to-morrow there is to be a parade of automobiles at Fair Haven. Valuable prizes will be

given for the best decorated cars. Were you going into that parade?"

"We didn't know anything about it," answered Joe.

"Is that possible! Well, it is going to be a big affair. I imagine the Voup crowd thought you had entered, and they wanted to spoil your chances of winning a prize."

"Maybe that's true," said Fred. "Si would do almost anything to keep us from winning a prize. He has been intensely jealous of us ever since we won the baseball and football championships."

The course of the tugboat was straight up the lake for Bear Island, a long, narrow strip of land, thickly covered with trees and brushwood. The shore was an irregular one, affording many coves where a landing might be made by boats drawing little water.

"I can't go in very close, excepting at the dock on the North Point," said Captain Smythe. "If you want me to, though, I'll circle the island. Maybe then we can learn if a landing was made there."

The tugboat was slowed up and sent up the shore on the west and down the shore on the east side of the island. Although the lads strained their eyes, they could see nothing that looked like the missing automobile.

"We'll go ashore, if you please," said Joe to the captain.

A landing was made at the dock, and the lads hurried on to the island, followed by Captain Smythe and Al Milton.

"Hurrah! Here we are!" shouted Harry. "Here are the auto tracks, as plain as day!"

All saw that he was right. The tracks were plainly visible in the grass, and they led up to a dilapidated structure which had once done service as a camper's cottage.

"Why, here are more auto tracks!" cried Paul, presently.

Joe said nothing, but ran to the old building and looked in. One side was gone, and through this the touring-car had been rolled into the place. But it was not there, and the boys could easily see where it had been rolled out again, and back to the dock.

"They had it here and took it away again!" said Harry, with a groan. "Oh, what luck!"

"They must have done it this morning!" exclaimed Paul. "They can't be so very far off with it."

Making certain that the touring-car was not on the island, the party boarded the tugboat once more.

"I don't know where to go next," said Joe, rubbing his chin reflectively.

"Might run up to Cat Island," said Captain Smythe.

This was done, but a short visit proved that the automobile had not been taken there.

"Supposing I run along the west shore of the lake?" suggested the tugboat captain. "Some of our best roads are over there. You might use my glasses and see if you can spot anything."

This course was followed out, and the boys took turns in using the marine glasses. For a long time they saw nothing unusual, but, as they passed a good-sized cove, Matt set up a shout.

"There is an auto, and I think it is Si Voup's machine!"

"Let us land and see!" returned Joe.

All saw the touring-car, which rested in the shade of a big tree by the roadside. There was a little dock at the cove, and here the boys and Al Milton landed. The bushes were thick beyond the dock, so that the touring-car and those around it were partly hidden from view.

"They have had a puncture, and are putting in a new inner tube," whispered Joe, as he and the others advanced cautiously through the bushes.

"Wait," said Fred. "Let us surprise them."

"I don't see our car," whispered Harry, looking up and down the road.

"Maybe if we listen to their talk, we'll find out what they did with it," returned his brother.

When the boys got close enough they found that only Si Voup and Ike Boardman were present. The cronies had a front wheel of the touring-car jacked up, and were putting in a new inner tube to replace one which had been pierced by a horseshoe nail.

"I don't understand why those other fellows don't come back!" growled Si. "They have had time enough."

"Well, Melville said he wouldn't come back," answered Ike Boardman. "He said it was time he got to work again."

"I wish he would go back to Cleveland," went on the bully. "I am afraid that some day, when he has been drinking, he'll tell somebody of what happened at the bridge."

"He said he wouldn't, Si."

"I know that,—but you can't depend on a fellow who drinks like he does."

"Say, I was struck when I saw how much he looked like that other fellow—the one we knocked down that day."

"Shut up, Ike! I don't want you to mention that!" cried the bully. "Forget it."

"I'm trying to forget it."

"Nobody saw us do it, and consequently nobody can prove it. We'll forget it ever happened."

"They are talking about you!" whispered Joe to Al Milton.

"So it would seem,—and about my relative, Al Melville," answered the young man.

"I can't get over it—how that Melville happened to see us tear up the bridge," said Ike Boardman. "Say, but I was scared when he showed himself and accused us of it. I thought he was going to have us locked up on the spot."

"Oh, he was only bluffing, just to get us to make it right with him. After I loaned him that ten dollars and promised to take him on the tour, he was all right. But shut up about it, or it may leak out yet," continued Si Voup, warningly.

"I don't see what is keeping those fellows," said Ike, as he started to blow up the tire that had just been put on. "We'll be ready to start off in another five minutes."

"Well, they had to take the flatboat back."

"That wouldn't take them as long as this."

"Well, we've got to wait, that's all."

"What do you think the Westmore crowd will do?"

"Oh, they'll raise a big rumpus, I suppose. But I don't care. They won't get in that parade, that's

sure. And they'll have a time of it getting their auto back."

"How will you let them know where the car is?"

"I'll see they get word somehow—after the parade is over," answered Si Voup. "I'll let them learn——"

Si stopped short and sprang back in amazement. Ike, seeing the movement, turned, and his usually ruddy face went white. Joe had emerged from the bushes beside the car, followed by the others.

"Si Voup, I guess we'll come to an understanding," said Joe, sternly. "In the first place, I want you to tell us where our automobile is. In the second place, I want you to explain how you dared to tear up that bridge that we were trying to cross. And in the third place, you may explain how you dared to run into Mr. Al Milton here and knock him down and leave him unconscious on the road."

CHAPTER XXVIII

CLEARING UP SOME MYSTERIES

If ever two boys were taken back, those two boys were Si Voup and Ike Boardman, and for fully ten seconds they could do little but stare at the crowd that confronted them.

"Wha—where did you come from?" stammered the bully at last.

"Did you—er—did you follow us?" asked Ike, slowly, and his teeth fairly chattered as he spoke.

"Never mind where we came from, Si," said Joe. "Tell me where our touring-car is."

"What do I know about your touring-car?"

"You stole it—you and Ike and those other fellows."

"Why, there is Melville! Did he give us away?" exclaimed Ike Boardman, as he caught sight of Al Milton.

"Shut up! It's not Melville, it's that other fellow," returned Si in a low tone. "Don't give yourself away like that," he added, with a dark look at his crony.

"So you are the fellows who knocked me down with your auto and left me," said Al Milton, striding to the front. "A nice piece of business, I must say!"

"Who says we knocked you down?" asked Si.

"You just admitted it."

"Say, did you listen to our talk?" asked Ike, his face growing as pale as before.

"We did," answered Fred. "And we know all about your doings. How you tore up the bridge, and everything."

"I—I didn't do that!" whined Ike. "Si——"

"Will you keep your mouth closed!" shouted the bully, in a rage. "Don't be a fool, Ike. Make them prove what they say."

"We'll prove it fast enough, if you want us to," said Joe. "But just now we want you to answer one question, and that is, Where is our machine?"

"How do we know?" muttered Si, doggedly.

"If you don't tell us, I'll march you down to Bartonville and have you locked up, Si Voup."

"Oh!" came in almost a moan from Ike.

"Yes, and you'll go, too, Ike Boardman," added Harry. "I want you to understand that stealing an automobile is a prison offense."

"We—we didn't—steal the car," groaned Ike. "We only——"

"You shut up!" yelled Si, and caught his crony by the arm.

"What did you do, Ike?" asked Fred. "You had better tell us, unless you want to be arrested."

"We only put it on a flatboat, and the other fellows took it to an island in the lake," answered Ike Boardman. He was so scared that he was almost ready to cry. "We only did it so you couldn't get in that parade over to Fair Haven day after tomorrow."

"What island did you take it to?"

"A place they call Bear Island."

"When?"

"About six o'clock this morning."

"The auto isn't there now," said Harry.

"It isn't?" Ike Boardman looked at the younger Westmore boy in wonder. "Then maybe you brought it away," he added, quickly.

"No, we didn't," answered Joe.

"Oh, they are fooling you, Ike," sneered Si. "They've got the machine back, and they want to scare you."

"We haven't seen the machine since it was taken from the barn in Tonk's Crossroads," said Paul. "We went to the island, having heard it might be there through the captain of a ferryboat, who saw you with the flatboat. But when we got to the

island we found the auto had been taken away again."

"Say, if you fellows will take my advice, you'll make a clean breast of this," said Matt, more seriously than he was wont to speak. "Joe and Harry and Fred are responsible to Mr. Corsen for that touring-car, and the car is worth a lot of money. If you had let it drop into the lake, there would have been a fine bill to pay. Tell them where it is, so they can get it without further delay."

"If it isn't at the island, I don't know where it is," said Ike, quickly.

"Melville and Darcy and Hicks took the machine on the flatboat," explained Si. "They said they would attend to storing it away. Then Darcy and Hicks were going to rejoin us here, and Melville was going to work again." The bully was growing alarmed in spite of his efforts to control himself.

"Who are Darcy and Hicks" asked Al Milton.

"The two fellows who started on the tour with us. They belong in Camdale."

"Are they cronies of Jerry Wardock?" questioned Fred.

"Yes."

"Then they are a bad pair, and there is no telling what they have done with the car," said Joe, and heaved a deep sigh.

"They hadn't any right to take the auto from the island—they promised to leave it there," exclaimed Ike. He turned to his crony: "Oh, Si, supposing they ran off with it!"

"It wouldn't be my fault if they did," answered the bully, quickly.

"Yes, it would be!" returned Fred. "If that auto isn't found, or if it is found and is damaged, we'll hold you and Ike responsible."

A hot discussion followed, and in the end Si and Ike showed that they were very much worried. The bully said he had intended to let Joe know where the car was by letter, and said he had cautioned Melville, Darcy, and Hicks to take good care of the machine.

"Whose flatboat was it you used?" asked Captain Smythe, who had come up to listen to the talk with interest.

"It belonged to an old man who calls himself Snup, a very cross-eyed fellow," said Ike.

"Oh, yes, Tommy Snup. I know him. He lives up the shore a short distance."

"Maybe we had better call on this Tommy Snup and see if he has gotten back with his flatboat," suggested Paul. "The flatboat must have been used to bring the car back to the mainland."

"I don't see why they took it to the island in

the first place, if they intended to run off with it."

"If they did that, it was done to blind us," said Si. "I begin to see into this. They went to the island and then plotted to bring the auto back and run off with it. Hicks was crazy to run a machine. I suppose they planned a regular tour. If anything happened to the car, they would lay it on Ike and me."

"Let us hunt up that old boatman," said Ike, who was now as anxious as anybody to recover the missing car.

It was decided that Paul and Matt should go down to the shore and make the trip in the tug, while Joe, Harry, Fred, and Al Milton remained with Si and Ike in the Voup car.

"You run the car to where the old boatman lives," said Joe to the bully. "And don't you play any game on us either."

"Say, Joe, will you let this matter drop if we get back the machine for you?" asked Ike, eagerly.

"I'll not promise anything until we get the car back," answered the older Westmore boy.

He sat on the front seat with Si, while the others occupied the tonneau with Ike. The latter was much worried, and said he would do all in his power to straighten matters out.

"I told Si not to take Darcy and Hicks along," said Ike, on the way. "They love to drink and gamble, and are altogether too loud. But they wanted to go, and so Si took them."

"What about Melville?" asked Fred.

"Oh, we met him by accident," stammered Ike, and his face grew red.

"He saw you tear up the planking of that bridge, didn't he?" asked Harry. "Come, you may as well own up to it."

"He did,—if you must know. He was watching us from down the stream, and he followed us, and —er—he watched us when you—er—got stuck on the bridge. He wanted to tell on us, but Si bought him off, by loaning him some money and promising him a good time on this tour."

"Si's cuff button was broken at the time, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but he didn't dare to own it," answered Ike.

The run down the lake shore to where Tommy Snup lived did not take long. When they arrived there they saw the tugboat just tying up at a little dock.

"Here is the flatboat!" cried Captain Smythe, pointing it out. "Now to find Snup and learn what became of the three fellows with the 'mobile."

Tommy Snup lived in a little cottage a short distance from the lake front. Joe ran up the path leading to it, and rapped sharply on the door. At first there was no answer to the summons, then an elderly woman appeared.

"What do you want?" she asked, abruptly.

"Does a man named Tommy Snup live here?" questioned Joe.

"He does."

"May I see him, please?"

"He isn't in now."

"Can you tell me where I can find him?"

"He went to Bartonville, I think."

"Did he say when he would be back?"

"Not until this afternoon."

Joe looked at his watch. It lacked ten minutes of twelve.

"You will excuse me, but this is very important," he explained. "I must find him if I possibly can."

"Well, I can't tell you where he went, excepting he was going to meet another man,—a man from Cresco who wants to see me."

"A man from Cresco?" repeated Joe.

"Yes, a man named Runnell."

"What, you don't mean Joel Runnell!" exclaimed the youth.

"Yes, that's the name." The woman looked at Joe curiously. "Do you happen to know him?"

"Indeed I do. He is an old hunter, and we have been out in the woods together more than once. Oh, say," Joe burst out, suddenly, "is your name Padderkins?"

"Why, yes!" and now the woman looked surprised.

"Then I guess I know why Joel Runnell wants to see you. It's about that property in Cresco. A man named Boardman says he has a claim on it, and Runnell wants to prove that he hasn't."

"Oh, that's it," said Mrs. Padderkins. "Well, I thought it might be."

"You used to live there, didn't you,—with Mr. Runnell's sister-in-law?"

"Yes, I lived there six years,—until she died, and then I came here to live with Snup, who is my cousin."

"Do you know about this Boardman claim?"

"Oh, yes, but it doesn't amount to anything. Mr. Boardman was paid all that was coming to him."

"I am glad to hear it," answered Joe. "Now one more question. Did you see anything of an automobile on Mr. Snup's flatboat this morning?"

"An automobile? No, indeed, I haven't seen any

automobile around here but yours," and she nodded at the Voup machine.

At this answer Joe's heart sank. He was about to put another question, when he heard a cry from the tugboat.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Tommy Snup is coming across the lake in a rowboat," said Captain Smythe. "He's got a stranger with him. Maybe it's one of them fellers you are after."

Joe and the others ran down to the lake front. As the rowboat came closer, Fred gave a cry.

"Why, it's Joel Runnell!"

"So it is," answered Joe. "He must have gotten here sooner than Mrs. Padderkins expected."

He ran down to greet the old hunter. Joel Runnell was surprised to see the boys, but his face at once took on a shrewd look.

"Say, looking for your touring-car?" he questioned, quickly.

"Yes," answered several.

"Somebody steal it?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Well, if you want to get it back you'll have to hurry. I saw two fellows with it a mile back of Bartonville less than an hour ago. They were on the ground, fixing a busted tire."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE RACE FOR THE CAR

"ARE you sure it was our car?" exclaimed Harry.

"It was that auto that belongs to Mr. Corsen," answered the old hunter. "I know it well—and, besides, I remember the number."

"Tell us just where you saw the car," said Fred, and thereupon Joel Runnell did so as well as he could. He said the two young men had had the rubber tire off of one of the rear wheels, and were putting on a patch of some kind.

"I was going to ask them about the machine first, but then I thought it wasn't no business of mine. But on the way here I got to thinkin' it over, and it came to my mind that mebbe the car was stolen," explained the old hunter.

"I am going after them, and at once!" cried Joe. "Si, you'll have to lend me your car,—or else run it for me," he added, turning to the bully.

"Darcy and Hicks had no right to run away with the car," answered the bully. "I'll take you after

them if you want me to. It was their business to leave the machine on the island, as they agreed to do."

"Do you—er—want me along?" asked Ike.

"No," returned Joe. "I'll take Harry and Fred and the rest," and so it was arranged. Just as the boys were getting into the Voup car the elder Westmore lad turned to Joel Runnell.

"You'll find that woman, Mrs. Padderkins, here," he said, in a low tone. "She says Mr. Boardman was paid off in full. Better talk to her and fix matters up before Ike gets a chance to queer your plans."

"I will," answered the old hunter. "I'll show that whole Boardman family they can't pull the wool over my eyes," he added, with energy.

The Voup car was not as large as that belonging to Munroe Corsen, and it was pretty well crowded. Al Milton went along, to see if Melville had been mixed up in the taking of the touring-car from the Island.

Old Tommy Snup had told the party what road to follow to get to the point described by Joel Runnell. This was not far from a small railroad depot, where the old hunter had left a train to make his way to the lake.

As the Voup car was passing the railroad station

several of the boys uttered a cry. There on the platform was a young fellow—the double of Al Milton.

"There is Al Melville now!" cried Milton. "Wait a minute, will you? I'd like to talk to him."

"I want to talk to him myself," answered Joe, grimly.

The automobile was stopped at the platform, and Al Milton and Joe alighted. Al Melville was smoking when they confronted him, but he dropped his cigarette in amazement.

"Yo—you here?" he faltered, looking first at Joe and then at his relative.

"Yes, I am here, and I want you to give an account of yourself," answered the older Westmore youth, sternly.

"Al, what have you been up to, anyway?" demanded Al Milton, as he caught the other young man by the shoulder.

"Di—did you get your machine back?" asked Melville, of Joe, ignoring the last question.

"Not yet—but we expect to soon."

"Oh, I went and made a fool of myself!" burst out Al Melville. "A great big fool!"

"You've been drinking again, Al," said Milton, reproachfully.

"Yes. And I've done a lot of things I shouldn't have done," added Al Melville. His face was much downcast. "I am mighty sorry I helped to run off with your auto," he added, to Joe.

"Where did you leave Darcy and Hicks?"

"At a place called Bear Island. They took the auto there on a flatboat. They wanted me to run off with them and the machine, but I wouldn't do it. I was sick of the whole affair, and I told them and Si Voup that I was going to quit and go to work."

"But you helped to take the car to the island, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"How did you leave?"

"I came away in a rowboat with the old fellow who owned the flatboat. He left the flatboat with Darcy and Hicks."

"Then they must have brought the car over to the mainland by themselves," put in Harry, who had come up. He eyed Al Melville sharply. "But you helped to steal it in the first place—and you knocked my brother down,—I saw you."

"So I did—and I am mighty sorry for it," answered the culprit, his face much downcast. "But it wasn't my plan—it was the plan of that Voup boy."

"Tell me the plain truth—but be quick about it," said Joe. "We want to get after those follows with the machine."

Thereupon Al Melville related his story,—how he had been in the vicinity of Lakeport on business, and how he had discovered Si at work loosening the planking of the bridge, and how he had seen the Corsen car go down into the opening. To buy him off, Si had loaned him some money that he needed. Then all hands had gone off to drink and to play pool, and later, while he was at Gardendale, Si had agreed to take him on the automobile tour. He had been told that Si and Joe were merely friendly rivals, and that the running away with the car would be looked upon by all as a joke. But he had not liked the actions of Darcy and Hicks, who had, on several occasions, proved themselves "bad eggs."

"Did they fail to pay some hotel bills?" asked Harry.

"Yes, and once Hicks ran off with some silver spoons. I accused him of it, but he said he had only taken the spoons as souvenirs of the outing," answered Al Melville.

"Hurry up, if you are going to catch those fellows!" called out Fred. "Why not do your talking when we come back?"

"I think you had better," said Al Milton. He looked at his relative. "Will you remain here with me until they return?"

"He has got to remain," put in Joe, quickly. "I don't want anybody to leave until this matter is straightened out."

"Yes, I'll stay," answered Melville, in a low voice.

"And I'll remain here with him," went on Milton. "If you don't find us here at the station, look for us at the Barton Hotel."

"Will you promise not to run away?" asked Joe, sharply.

"I won't run away," answered Al Melville.

The boys ran back to the touring-car. Si had remained at the wheel, not caring to face Melville. As a matter of fact, the pair had had a bitter quarrel before parting, and each was inclined to blame the other for what had occurred.

"Now then, Si, crowd on all the speed you can!" exclaimed Joe. "We must get after those rascals before they have a chance to get away."

"I'll do what I can," answered the bully. "But say," he added, in a voice that shook a little, "if we catch 'em, you won't let 'em hammer me, will you?"

"They shan't touch anybody," answered Joe.

"If you have them locked up, they may want to make a charge against me and Ike too."

"We'll see about that after we get our car back," was all Joe would answer to this.

Presently the Voup car came to the top of a long low hill. All were on the watch, and Matt set up a cry:

"There they are!"

"Where?" asked the others.

"Down yonder!" The fun-loving youth, now very serious, pointed with his hand. "They are just cranking up!"

"I see them!" said Harry. "Hark!"

All listened, and from a distance sounded the sharp chugging of a motor as the engine started up. Then the throttle was turned down, and they saw the fellow who had cranked up leap into the front seat of the car beside his companion. A second later the Corsen machine commenced to move off down the country road.

"Stop!" yelled Fred. "Stop, you rascals!"

"Si, turn on more speed!" ordered Joe, sharply, as he saw the car ahead gather speed.

"I'm—er—afraid," faltered the bully. "It's down hill. We might go in the ditch!"

"Then let me take the wheel," commanded the older Westmore youth. "Those fellows are not

going to get away with our car if I can stop them!"

He made Si stand up, and a quick shift was made, both boys momentarily holding the wheel. Then Joe, gripping the steering apparatus firmly, let out the brake. Forward bounded the Voup car down the long hill, gathering speed at every revolution of the wheels.

"Look out!" whined Si, crouching low in the seat Joe had vacated. "If you leave the road, it will smash us to bits!"

"We'll not leave the road," was the determined answer.

The Corsen car had been started from the bottom of the hill, and was making good time over the smooth road beyond. As the other machine streaked down the hill one of the fellows in the stolen car looked back.

"They see us!" declared Paul.

"And they are going to run for it," added Harry, as the car ahead increased its speed.

"Do those chaps know much about running a car?" demanded Harry of Si.

"Hicks does. He was crazy to be at the wheel all the time. He is the one who is driving now."

"He has cut out the muffler!" cried Fred. "That

shows he is going to get all the speed out of her he can!"

"Well, I can do the same," returned Joe. "Si, have you plenty of gasoline?"

"Yes."

"And oil?"

"I think so."

"What about water?"

"I filled the radiator with fresh water this morning."

"What about our car?"

"We didn't put any gasoline in it. But maybe Darcy and Hicks did."

"If they have got our car in good working order, we'll never catch her," said Harry.

"Humph! my car can go some!" answered Si, with a little show of his old-time spirit.

"Yes, but it can't catch the Corsen car, Si, and you know it."

Harry's words seemed destined to come true, for, looking ahead, the occupants of the Voup machine saw the other car gradually lengthen the distance between them.

"Wish I had a gun," muttered Fred. "I believe I'd shoot a hole in one of those tires—even if I had to pay for it afterwards!"

"Railroad crossing ahead!" cried Paul, as

they heard a locomotive whistle. "Watch out, Joe!"

In another moment the road took a turn, coming out between several cleared fields. Not far away was a railroad crossing, and just beyond it a little station. A train was in the station, ready to pull out.

"There they go!" called out Fred, as the Corsen car dashed up to the platform of the station.

"They are leaving the machine!"

"And boarding the train!"

It was true, both young men had leaped from the touring-car, run across the depot platform, and jumped on the last car of the train, which had already started.

"That's the last of those fellows!" muttered Harry. "Too bad they got away!"

"Never mind, we have the auto—and that's the main thing," answered Joe.

"Look! look! she's moving!" screamed Fred, and pointed to the Corsen car, the engine of which had been left running. The stout youth was right, the empty touring-car had commenced to swing forward. Now, with nobody to direct its course, it started on its way past the depot to the country road beyond.

CHAPTER XXX

THE PRIZE PARADE—CONCLUSION

"THE car will be smashed up!"

"Stop her, somebody, before she runs into something!"

"Look out, or you'll be run over!"

Such were some of the cries that arose, both from the boys in the Voup car and the people on the depot platform, as all saw the big touring-car start on its wild dash from the railroad station.

On the instant the two runaways were forgotten. Joe and his chums thought only of saving Munroe Corsen's property from destruction. With quick wit the elder Westmore boy started up the Voup car and sent it spinning after the other.

"Fred, Harry, can you do anything?" he gasped, as the second car ran forward.

"I'll jump to the other car, if it can be done," answered Fred.

"So will I," added Harry.

"Don't fall between and get run over!" panted Si. The peril of the situation had caused him to

turn pale. He knew that if the first car should stop suddenly the second might crash into it. But Joe was on guard, ready to jam on both brakes at the first warning.

The Corsen car had passed the end of the depot and was lurching and swaying from one side of the roadway to the other. Every instant the spectators expected it to crash into some tree or building. But it kept on, and now the second car was almost beside it.

"The bridge! Look out for the bridge!" was the cry, coming from a man who had just leaped from the roadway to safety.

The boys gave a swift glance ahead. Down the road was a bridge, spanning a deep brook. It was not likely the runaway car could cross that in safety.

Fred had stationed himself at the side of the Voup car. Now with a leap he cleared the side of Si's car and landed in the tonneau of the runaway. Scarcely had his feet touched, when he leaned forward and caught hold of the steering-wheel.

The runaway car was but two yards from the bridge. It was headed directly for one of the stone walls. With a rapidity that was truly marvelous, Fred threw the wheel over. Past the stone wall rushed the machine, one fender scraping the stones. Then it came out on the roadway beyond.

"Hurrah! he's got her!" cried Matt. "Say, that's great work!" he added, enthusiastically.

"Best I ever saw!" added Harry.

As soon as he was able to do so, Fred slowed down the runaway car and then stopped it. Joe had already slackened the speed of the Voup car. When the others came up they saw the stout lad wiping the thick beads of perspiration from his forehead.

"Fred, that was splendid!" cried Joe.

"The best ever!" echoed his brother.

"You saved the car," cried Paul. "Had it struck the bridge it would have been smashed to pieces, sure!"

"Those fellows who ran away ought to be captured," said Matt. "It was a foul piece of work to leave the car with the power turned on."

"Maybe they thought they turned the power off," said Joe. "Nevertheless, I think I'll see if we can't catch them," he added.

But to catch Darcy and Hicks proved impossible. The rascals left the train at the very next station, three miles away, and then took to the woods. They drifted out West, and it was a long time before either of them was heard of again.

The boys were anxious to look the stolen car over, and they were overjoyed, when they did so, to find it had not been injured. A tire had been punctured

and repaired, but as this was liable to happen at any time, they thought it of no consequence. Joe took charge of the machine, and Fred and Paul went with him. Harry and Matt rode back to the railroad station where they had left Milton and Melville. Then the entire crowd rode back to the Snup cottage.

"I don't know how you fellows feel, but I am getting hungry," said Matt. It was now half-past two in the afternoon.

"I am almost too excited to eat," declared Harry. "I want to see this whole thing straightened out."

"Maybe we can get a lunch from Mrs. Padderkins, if we pay for it," said Fred.

It was decided to send Captain Smythe and the tugboat back to Bartonville, and this was done. The boys sent a message to the Deans, stating they would call later.

"Well, I'm in luck," remarked Joel Runnell, when they reappeared. "I've got all the evidence to prove that Mr. Boardman was paid every cent that was coming to him. So that property in Cresco is now Cora's free and clear."

"I am sure we are all glad to hear that," returned Fred.

"That Boardman boy tried to put in his oar, but I soon shut him up," added Joel Runnell. "I told

him to tell his father if we were bothered any more we'd have the law on 'em." Let me add here that the Boardmans never said any more about a claim on the Cresco property, and the Runnells continued to live there without further molestation.

When told she would be well paid for it, Mrs. Padderkins readily consented to provide the entire party with dinner, and this was served as soon as it could be cooked. In the meantime there was a good deal of talking, some of it extremely animated.

Not only Si and Ike, but also Al Melville, were decidedly sorry for what had been done, and they did their best to show it. Melville broke down completely and said it was his appetite for drink, and his passion for having a good time generally, that had caused him to go on the tour and act as he had.

"I have agreed to loan him some money," said Al Milton, "and he has agreed to turn over a new leaf. He will settle for any damage he has caused, and I trust you boys will forgive him and give him another chance."

"Well, I'll give him another chance, if you wish it," answered Joe, who had grown to like Al Milton very much. The other lads were willing to do whatever their leader desired.

Si was angry to think that Darcy and Hicks had attempted to really steal the touring-car, yet in one

way he and Ike were glad that the fellows had gotten away.

"I don't want any publicity about this," said the bully to Joe and the others. "We only went into it as a bit of fun—although I realize now that we went too far. I'm willing to pay for what damage we did—and what damage Darcy and Hicks did,—and I and Ike will pay that hotel bill, and pay for those spoons, and for some other things."

"Yes, but what about running into Al Milton, and tearing up that bridge——" began Harry.

"Oh, call it off, please do!" burst out Ike. "We didn't mean to hurt anybody, really we didn't. We were only mad, because you fellows seem to get the best of us every time."

"Humph! I reckon they got the best o' you this time, too," came dryly from Joel Runnell.

"I know it," mumbled Ike.

In the midst of the talk, dinner was served, in the cottage and on a table set in a grape arbor near by. Mrs. Padderkins had "spread herself," and the fine repast she offered put all of the boys in better humor.

"Well, we'll call the whole thing off," declared Joe, after consulting with his chums and his brother. "But you must promise to settle all bills, and to leave us alone in the future."

"We'll do it," answered Si and Ike, readily. A little later both said they were tired of touring in the automobile, and would start back for Lakeport the next day. They agreed to take Joel Runnell along, and leave him at Cresco, so that the old hunter would have to pay no railroad fare home.

It was not until evening that Joe and his crowd started for Bartonville. Here they separated from Al Milton and Al Melville.

"I hope we meet again," said Milton, as he shook hands, and the others said the same. Melville spoke but little, being heartily ashamed of what he had done.

The boys put up at the Barton Hotel, and after supper made a call at the Dean home. Here they had to tell their story in detail, to which Mr. and Mrs. Dean and Grace listened with interest. They thanked the shingle manufacturer for the use of his tugboat.

"I am glad you got your car back safe and sound," said Grace. And then she told them the particulars of the auto meeting that was to come off, and the fancy dress parade.

"Now you have your car back, you ought to enter it in the parade," she said. "I would dearly love to help you trim it up. My cousin Mary will be here to see the parade."

"Where is it to be held" asked Fred.

"At Fair Haven. But they will run over here, I think."

The matter was talked over for a while, and the next morning the boys went to see the head of the committee. They were allowed to enter the touring-car, and at once laid plans to decorate it in fine style. Mary Rowan arrived at the Dean home, and the two girls aided the boys in making as fine a showing as possible. The Dean garden was admired for its beautiful roses, and great baskets of these were picked and strung on wires, and then the wires were passed around and over the car, until it was in reality a perfect bower of roses.

"You must ride in the car," declared Joe, to the two young ladies, and to this they readily consented, and got ready two fancy white dresses for that purpose.

The automobile meet was a great success, and when the fancy dress parade began there were thirty-two cars in line. But not a car was as handsomely decorated as the Corsen car, and it was awarded the first prize, a gold medal.

"I guess Mr. Corsen will be proud of that," said Joe. "I am going to have his name engraved on it." Later on, when the rich gentleman received the medal, he was profoundly pleased,

and thanked the lads heartily for what they had done.

"And now to finish up the tour!" cried Fred, on the morning after the parade, and after parting with the Deans.

"That's the talk!" returned Harry. "We have been loafing long enough. We must make a hundred miles to-day."

"A hundred and ten, according to my schedule," came from Joe, who was at the wheel.

"Say, but we have had just a few adventures!" mused Paul.

"So we have!" said Joe.

The boys imagined, with Si and Ike out of their path, that the future would be plain sailing for them. But this was not to be. Adventures in plenty still awaited them, and what some of these happenings were I shall relate in the next volume of this "Lakeport Series," in which we shall learn why Harry Westmore left home very suddenly and very mysteriously.

"Start her up, Joe!" called out Matt. "Turn on your seventy-miles-an-hour, and let her go!"

"Say, I feel as fresh as a bird to-day!" said Fred.

"Automobiling can't be beat!" declared Harry. "It's the best sport yet!"

"Right you are," returned his brother. And then Joe turned on the power, and the big touring-car rolled forward on its journey; and here we will say good-by to the automobile boys of Lakeport.

THE END

THE LAKEPORT SERIES

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

VOLUME ONE

THE GUN CLUB BOYS OF LAKEPORT

Or The Island Camp

321 pages Illustrated Price $1.25

A BRIGHT, breezy, outdoor story, telling how several lads organized a gun club and went camping in the winter time. They had with them a trusty old hunter who revealed to them many of the secrets of Nature as found in the woods. A volume any boy who loves a gun will appreciate.

This story of camping and hunting will appeal to every American boy.—*Register, New Haven, Conn.*

VOLUME TWO

THE BASEBALL BOYS OF LAKEPORT

Or The Winning Run

315 pages Illustrated Price $1.25

WITH the coming of summer the boys turned their attention to baseball and organized a club, and played many thrilling games. The rivalry was of the keenest, and the particulars are given of a plot to injure the Lakeport nine and make them lose the most important game of all.

Will appeal to every healthy American boy.—*American, Baltimore, Md.*

VOLUME THREE

THE BOAT CLUB BOYS OF LAKEPORT

Or The Water Champions

300 pages Illustrated Price $1.25

THIS time the scene is shifted to the lake. The boys all know how to row and sail a boat, and they organize a club and have fun galore. During a squall on the lake something of great value is lost overboard. The abduction of a little girl adds to the interest of the volume. Every lad who loves the water will read this volume with pleasure.

This author knows how to please red-blooded lads.—*Times-Union, Albany, N. Y.*

THE LAKEPORT SERIES

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

VOLUME FOUR

THE FOOTBALL BOYS OF LAKEPORT

Or More Goals Than One

Illustrated by Arthur O. Scott 12mo Cloth Price, $1.25

FOOTBALL is one of the most popular sports of this country, and in this tale Mr. Stratemeyer has shown what the jolly and dauntless boys of Lakeport did when the football season came around. Their heroes of the baseball field were not long in organizing an eleven and getting into practice, and there followed a series of exciting contests for the Lake Pennant. The boys had a college man to coach them, and made a number of brilliant plays, some of which are described by the author in detail.

"A rattling good story."—*San Francisco Chronicle.*

"It is just such a book as Mr. Stratemeyer excells in writing."—*Union, Springfield, Mass.*

"Boys who love football will enjoy reading this volume."—*Capital, Des Moines, Ia.*

VOLUME FIVE

THE AUTOMOBILE BOYS OF LAKEPORT

Or A Run for Fun and Fame

Illustrated 12mo Cloth Price, $1.25

HOW the lads of Lakeport got their big touring car, how they went on a long trip through the hills, and how they won a peculiar race, is told in a manner to please both young and old. Once the machine was almost consumed in a fire, and again it was stolen by some rivals who carried it away on a flatboat to an island. Mr. Stratemeyer is a motorist himself and therefore understands his subject thoroughly.

"The author of the Lakeport Series, Mr. Edward Stratemeyer, is well known for his delightful boys' stories."—*Philadelphia Ledger.*

"The Lakeport Series, by Edward Stratemeyer, is the lineal descendant of the better class of boys' books of a generation ago."—*Christian Advocate, New York.*

"The Lakeport Series will be fully as popular as the author's Dave Porter Series."—*San Francisco Call.*

Mr. Stratemeyer's popularity will be increased by "Dave Porter."—*Times, Hartford, Conn.*

DAVE PORTER SERIES

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

VOLUME ONE

DAVE PORTER AT OAK HALL

Or the Schooldays of an American Boy

312 pages Illustrated Price $1.25

NEVER was there a brighter, more manly, thoroughly up-to-date boy than Dave Porter, and all boys who read about him, and girls too, for the matter of that, will be sure to love him from the start. How, as a green country boy, he went to Oak Hall, how he was hazed, and how he had to fight his way through is told with a naturalness that is true to life.

The story is told with great fidelity to real life.—*Eagle, Brooklyn, N. Y.*

VOLUME TWO

DAVE PORTER IN THE SOUTH SEAS

Or The Strange Cruise of the Stormy Petrel

286 pages Illustrated Price $1.25

DAVE is the same bright, wide-awake youth he was at school, and his adventures on shipboard and among the unexplored islands of the South Seas will render him dearer to the hearts of the boys than ever. Dave is trying to solve the mystery of his parentage, and several of his school chums are with him during his wanderings, some sharing his perils. A great tidal wave sends the ship into a strange harbor and there follows a mutiny which places a number on board in great peril.

Mr. Stratemeyer's heroes are full of fun, and the activity that goes with youth, strength and high spirits. They are all safe—they work hard and play fairly. —*Star, Washington, D. C.*

Mr. Stratemeyer has seldom introduced a more popular hero than Dave Porter. He is a typical boy, manly, brave, always ready for a good time if it can be obtained in an honorable way.—*Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wis.*

DAVE PORTER SERIES

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

VOLUME THREE

DAVE PORTER'S RETURN TO SCHOOL

Or Winning the Medal of Honor

304 pages Illustrated Price $1.25

IN this volume the scene is shifted back to Oak Hall, and once again Dave becomes the centre of as interesting a group of schoolboys as it is pssible to imagine. There is a strong plot, with plenty of fun, and not a few rivalries on the athletic field, and the whole volume has a swing and a dash that are irresistible.

A good wholesome story, full of fun and go.—*Christian Work, N. Y.*

Each story that comes from Edward Stratemeyer's pen is eagerly read.—*Boston Herald.*

VOLUME FOUR

DAVE PORTER IN THE FAR NORTH

Or The Pluck of an American Schoolboy

285 pages Illustrated Price $1.25

IN this book Dave is still at his well-liked boarding-school, Oak Hall, with his lively but manly comrades, who rejoice with him that he not only has discovered his parentage, but has a father and sister living, though unaware of his existence. Dave cannot rest until he finds those of his own family, and having secured leave of absence from school and accompanied by his chum, the son of a United States Senator, he goes to England only to find that his father has left on an expedition to the upper part of Norway. The boys follow in a most exciting pursuit which is replete with adventure.

The success of the "Dave Porter Series" is already surpassing Mr. Stratemeyer's previous triumphs.—*American, Nashville, Tenn.*

Dave Porter is a typical American schoolboy, a scholar, an athlete and a good fellow.—*Herald, Rochester, N. Y.*

DAVE PORTER SERIES

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

VOLUME FIVE

DAVE PORTER AND HIS CLASSMATES

Or For the Honor of Oak Hall

Illustrated by Charles Nuttall 12mo Cloth Price, $1.25

IN this volume Dave is back at Oak Hall and he brings about the complete reformation of a former bully, who was rapidly going to the bad. Athletic events and jolly fun are constantly mingled, and as evidence that the boys are not at school entirely for that, many take high honors at the close of the year, Dave being prize essayist, to the great delight of his friends.

"The best type of American schoolboy."—*Boston Globe.*

"Athletic events are told with a zest that shows the author's ability in that direction."—*News, Buffalo, N. Y.*

"Will hold the attention of the readers from beginning to end."—*Citizen, Brooklyn, N. Y.*

VOLUME SIX

DAVE PORTER AT STAR RANCH

Or The Cowboy's Secret

Illustrated by Lyle T. Hammond 12mo Cloth Price, $1.25

FROM his home, Dave, in company with his sister and some chums, journeys to the boundless west. At the ranch the lads fall in with both good and bad cowboys, and the hero has a thrilling time of it riding a "busting bronco." Some horses disappear in a mysterious manner, and while trying to get back to the ranch on foot two of the lads are caught in a furious storm, that blows down a big tree on top of them. There are many scenes of hunting and rounding-up of cattle, and once a stampede adds to the excitement. Mr. Stratemeyer has traveled through the country he describes and gives a picture as accurate as it is entertaining.

"The author of 'Dave Porter' is a prime favorite with the boys."—*Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer.*

"Edward Stratemeyer's 'Dave Porter' has become exceedingly popular."—*Boston Globe.*

"Dave and his friends are nice, manly chaps."—*Times-Democrat, New Orleans.*

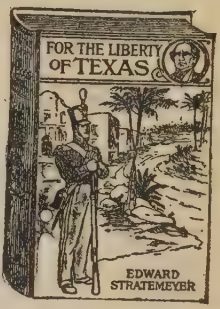
MEXICAN WAR SERIES

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

VOLUME ONE

FOR THE LIBERTY OF TEXAS

12mo Cloth Illustrated Price, $1.25



MUCH is told here of Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, Colonel Bowie, and other Texan heroes in connection with the entertaining story of the fortunes of two brothers, Dan and Ralph Radbury. The fall of the Alamo is introduced, and other famous incidents.

VOLUME TWO

WITH TAYLOR ON THE RIO GRANDE

12mo Cloth Illustrated Price, $1.25

AS with each of the series, this is a complete story, but continues the adventures of the patriotic young Radbury brothers. They serve under General Taylor at Palo Alto, Monterey, and Buena Vista and share in the glory of "Old Rough and Ready."

VOLUME THREE

UNDER SCOTT IN MEXICO

12mo Cloth Illustrated Price, $1.25

IN the concluding volume of this valuable historical series Dan and Ralph come under the command of Gen. Winfield Scott and finally bear their part in the triumphant entry of the proud city of Mexico.

These books were first issued under a pen name and by another publisher. We have now placed them in the regular list of this unequaled writer for boys, with an entirely new cover design in keeping with the uniformly rich appearance of our Stratemeyer books.

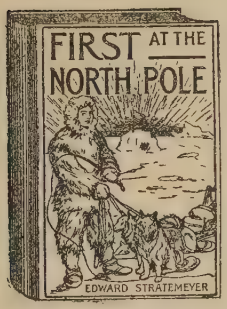
"There are few live boys in the country who have not read the intensely interesting books of Mr. Stratemeyer, and who do not have a warm place in their hearts for him. No living American writer of boys' books is so widely read, and none so sure of a cordial welcome for everything that comes from his pen."—*Chicago News.*

THE UP-TO-DATE BOOK FOR BOYS

FIRST AT THE NORTH POLE
Or Two Boys in the Arctic Circle

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Illustrated by Charles Nuttall 12mo Cloth $1.25



HERE is a new and up-to-date volume, telling the particulars of a marvellous journey from the New England coast to the North Pole. How the vessel happened to be fitted out, how she was almost burned up ere a start was made, and how the two boy heroes chanced to be on board, makes an opening no reader would care to miss. Then follows a sea trip to Greenland, with an encounter with an immense iceberg and other perils of the deep. When the steamer finally becomes jammed hard and fast in the fields of ice, a brave start is made by the exploring party, accompanied by some Esquimaux and several dog sledges. There is a fight with polar bears and with a walrus, and one of the lads is carried off on a large cake of floating ice. All have heard of the achievements of Cook and Peary and all are anxious to gain the "top of the world." With the thermometer often at 45 degrees below zero they push on steadily, facing death more than once. Their Esquimaux rebel and try to run off with the supplies, and sickness and snow-blindness add to their misery. When at last the North Pole is gained, it becomes the gravest kind of a question how to get back to civilization alive.

In addition to being a thrilling romance of polar exploration, the tale is rich in history, relating something of the doings of Franklin, Kane, Hall, De Long, Cook, Peary and numerous other Arctic heroes of the past and present. It also gives views of the Esquimaux, their occupations and pastimes, and how they live. A volume that ought to be on every bookshelf in the land.

COLONIAL SERIES

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

FIRST VOLUME

WITH WASHINGTON IN THE WEST

Or a Soldier Boy's Battles in the Wilderness

Illustrated by A. B. Shute 302 pages $1.25

MR. STRATEMEYER has woven into an excellent story something of Washington's youthful experience as a surveyor, leading on to the always thrilling Braddock's defeat. The hero, David Morris, is several years younger than Washington, with whom he becomes intimately associated. Pictures of pioneer life are given; scenes with friendly Indians, and old-time games.

SECOND VOLUME

MARCHING ON NIAGARA

Or The Soldier Boys of the Old Frontier

Illustrated by A. B. Shute Price $1.25

THIS story relates the doings of two young soldiers who join the Colonial forces in a march on Fort Niagara, during the time of the war with France, when the whole territory between the Blue Ridge and the Great Lakes was in a state of unrest. Many side lights are thrown into the colonial period, and much useful information is given of the pioneers who helped to make our country what it is to-day.

David Morris is a great favorite, and a short time is wooed a true "Injun" story that is sure to delight the boys.—*Cincinnati Times-Star.*

THIRD VOLUME

AT THE FALL OF MONTREAL

Or a Soldier Boy's Final Victory

Illustrated by A. B. Shute Price $1.25

THIS volume relates the adventures of Dave Morris and his cousin Henry during the two last campaigns against the French for the possession of Canada and the territory below the great lakes. The soldiering of the brothers at Quebec under General Wolfe, and the memorable battle on the Plains of Abraham, are given in detail. There are many stirring scenes at Ticonderoga, and there are also adventures while fishing and hunting, and with the Indians.

The chief charm of Mr. Stratemeyer's stories lies in the fact that an enormous quantity of valuable information, collected from the most reliable sources, is deftly woven into the narrative without taking away from the interest.—*Philadelphia Inquirer.*

COLONIAL SERIES

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

FOURTH VOLUME

ON THE TRAIL OF PONTIAC

Or Pioneer Boys of the Ohio

Illustrated by A. B. Shute Price $1.25

THIS volume tells of times in our country immediately after the war with France for the possession of Canada. A fight with the Indians and the French in a snowstorm is especially realistic, and the entire book carries with it the atmosphere of colonial times.

Boys are attracted to stories by Edward Stratemeyer, and they will enjoy "On the Trail of Pontiac."—*Plain Dealer, Cleveland, O.*

VOLUME FIVE

THE FORT IN THE WILDERNESS

Or The Soldier Boys of the Indian Trails

306 pages Illustrated by A. B. Shute Price $1.25

THIS story is one of the best tales of Colonial days penned by this favorite author for young people. A central figure is the noted Indian warrior, Pontiac, and the particulars are given of the rise and fall of that awful conspiracy against the whites, which will never be forgotten, and vivid pen pictures are given of fights in and around the forts and at a trading-post on the Ohio.

VOLUME SIX

TRAIL AND TRADING POST

Or The Young Hunters of the Ohio

320 pages Illustrated Price $1.25

A FINE closing volume to this deservingly popular series. Here we again meet the Morris boys, and many other friends. The plot centres about the possession of a certain trading-post on the Ohio River at a time just previous to the Revolution, and there are some encounters with the unfriendly Indians and with some Frenchmen who wished to claim the post as their own.

There are few authors whose books have so wide and so thoroughly satisfactory a reading as those by Mr. Stratemeyer.—*Courier, Boston.*

American Boys' Biographical Series

By EDWARD STRATEMEYER

VOLUME ONE

AMERICAN BOYS' LIFE OF WILLIAM McKINLEY

300 pages Illustrated by A. B. Shute and from Photographs $1.25

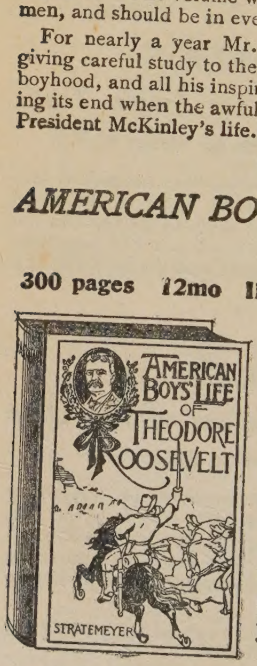
HERE is told the whole story of McKinley's boyhood days, his life at school and at college, his work as a school teacher, his glorious career in the army, his struggles to obtain a footing as a lawyer, his efforts as a Congressman and a Governor, and lastly his prosperous career as our President, all told in a style particularly adapted to boys and young men. The book is full of interesting anecdotes, all taken from life, showing fully the sincere, honest, painstaking efforts of a life cut all too short. The volume will prove an inspiration to all boys and young men, and should be in every library.

For nearly a year Mr. Stratemeyer has been gathering material and giving careful study to the life of the young William, his childhood, his boyhood, and all his inspiring and romantic history. The story was nearing its end when the awful finale came and tragedy ended the drama of President McKinley's life.—*New York Journal.*

VOLUME TWO

AMERICAN BOYS' LIFE OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT

300 pages 12mo Illustrated from Photographs $1.25



THIS excellent work for young people covers the whole life of our strenuous executive, as schoolboy, college student, traveler, author, hunter and ranchman, as assemblyman, as civil service commissioner, as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, as a daring rough rider, as Governor of New York, and lastly as President. Full of stories taken from real life and told in a manner to interest both young and old.

We unreservedly recommend Mr. Stratemeyer's books for boys. They are wholesome, accurate as to historical details, and always interesting.—*Boston Times.*